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BORGIA

BOOKS BY
ZONA GALE

Fiction

MISS LULU BETT
FAINT PERFUME
PREFACE TO A LIFE
BIRTH
YELLOW GENTIAN AND BLUE
WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL
BORGIA

Plays

MISTER PITT
THE NEIGHBORS
MISS LULU BETT

Poems

THE SECRET WAY

Essays

PORTAGE, WISCONSIN AND OTHER ESSAYS

Borgia
ZONA GALE



NEW YORK
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1929

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1929

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To my husband
William Lleywelyn Breese

BORGIA

29795

MARFA said that she had killed Paul Barker, and when her friends murmured polite oh, noes, she insisted: "I did. Just as much as if I had stabbed him." But her bewilderment seemed not so much to be that Paul was gone, as that she, Marfa, had in some way failed. She meant to be so right.

She sat with her mother in the screened porch and waited for Mr. Bartholomew, whom her father had gone to meet at the railway-station. "Mother," she said, "I keep thinking of the night he first came here." "Mr. Bartholomew?" her mother asked. Marfa allowed her eyes to rest on her mother, held them there expressionless of reproach, then dropped them expressionless of patience. "He came in that door there . . . good-looking, good clothes. He had so much hope, mother." When her mother besought, "Marfa, don't dwell . . ." it hardly rippled her daughter's gaze, who continued: "And it didn't just happen — had you thought of that? It isn't as if he had happened to meet Stella through me. I deliberately took him there." Her mother said:

"You didn't give Stella's children diphtheria!" Marfa permitted a hollow pause, round which her mother's words rolled, and found no level. "He caught diphtheria in the house where *I* took him," Marfa insisted monotonously, "and died." "But it wasn't you who were his physician," her mother persisted. "It was I who killed him," said Marfa, almost proudly.

The hollow porch, curved in its hollow of leaves, of lawn, of calm afternoon air, looked inward on a room fashioned in some expectation of beautiful living, where now her words ran grotesquely; looked outward upon a border of pavement where the neighbors passed faithfully — no one suddenly going mad or naked or affirming that he had killed anybody. Mis' Armes and Mis' Mears were in blue serge, Everett Malin went in pepper-and-salt nine years old, and Toddie Dexter, imbecile, wheeled his cart of soap and shoe-polish. No one else appeared to have murdered; but Marfa said it over, quite loudly, "It was I who killed him," so that her mother exclaimed: "Marfa, please!" But Marfa looked at her for a space, then turned away without winking. The girl raised her eyes to the encompassing hollow of silken sky, beautiful wilds of light. "I shall never be the same," she said.

Her mother moved with an air which Marfa had seen her assume when she mentioned her own name to strangers. "My dear child," she said, "I have borne you. Are you going to ruin my work by regret for something you couldn't help?" "Mother," said Marfa, "you bore me once but not since. I've borne myself every day. I don't want to ruin your work or my own either. And here I go and kill this nice young man." "Marfa," cried her mother, "I believe you like to say that!"

Luna came to the porch. She was older, her color more amber. She sat down, her hands tense on her lap; asked "Where's father? Did Mr. Bartholomew come?" was told that it wasn't time yet, and gazed round with a tortured air. "You look so sad and so smart," Marfa said, and Luna, her hands tense, murmured, "How can you? How can you think of any one looking smart"; but Marfa cried: "Absurd! It's as disrespectful to Paul for you to look smart as it is for me to *say* it." Mrs. Manchester interrupted: She should go insane if Paul Barker was mentioned to her again. Luna moved her tense hands and said: "Mother, *you* didn't kill him. While I . . ." With a sharp air of indignation Marfa inserted: "You! Why will you insist like that, Luna — when you had nothing to do

with it?" But Luna said, monotonously, as if she had said it a great many times: "It was I who mentioned him to Stella. That was why she asked you to take him there. . . ." "You're both entirely too sensitive," said Mrs. Manchester. "I might as well say Paul's death was *my* fault because I gave birth to the two of you." Marfa murmured distastefully, "The two of you," shot a look at her sister, who met it stonily, as in a mood of fixed loyalty to their mother — but she could not have been thinking of their mother, for she dropped her look to her knees, passed her hands tensely along her lap, and said quite loudly: "It wasn't eleven o'clock, because I had to go for a fitting at eleven. But it was nearly time and I was hurrying . . ." Marfa murmured, "Luna, please . . ." but Luna went right on: "In the window at Salters' I saw an orange bathing-cap — think of Paul's death depending on an orange bathing-cap. . . ." Marfa cried: "Luna, you simply had nothing to do . . ." Luna pressed a tense hand along her cheek: "I went in at Salters' to buy the bathing-cap. And there was Stella at that counter. And I told her about Paul — how stunning he was, how clever, what a dancer . . . and of course when she saw you . . ." "I should have taken him there any-

way," Marfa said violently; "I'd been intending to take him there. . . ." Luna pressed her tense hands together: "But not so soon, but not so soon," she said. "What do you make of a world like that — to kill a friend by buying an orange bathing-cap — and I didn't even buy the cap. . . ." Marfa laughed, barely heard Luna's "How *can* you?" and went on: "But, Luna, if I hadn't had my new green georgette and wanted to show it off to Stella, I wouldn't have suggested going there when I did . . . oh, it was all I. Paul was my friend, Stella is *my* friend, it was I from the first . . ." Mrs. Manchester cried: "Are you girls going through this every day of your lives?" And Luna said: "But, mother, Marfa seems to *want* to be the one who killed him . . . just to protect me." Mrs. Manchester repeated in exasperation: "Well, she seems to want to be the one." Marfa said: "I *was* the one."

The porch ran round them. Its copper-wire screens shone in the sun, a thin wall of webbing separating a trial eternity from eternity. Here the fluent green, running facilely from plant to plant, and a pulsing yellow-winged thing in a copper cage seemed skilfully drawing through from some inner area measure of both color and song most certainly risen elsewhere, most

certainly not having had their birth there on that porch. The light reed furniture, hollowed in expectation of the human body, faithfully fashioned to follow the curves of the human body, wore an expression of expectation which amounted to positive motion; but the shaded tile lay, the latticed ceiling spread, and the screens of copper wire rose in indifference to the beings who had thus seized upon pure surface, pure direction, and made them their own, for earthly uses.

Marfa had been a glorious child, but by the time that she was twelve the glory had left her. She had become vain, critical, complaining. Her voice had developed a cadence of grievance. Everything that she said moved to the measure of, "Well, I don't think she ought to have done that —" the tone running up and down, up and down. This grievance she applied to persons, events, anticipations. She became intolerably sensitive to everything that might wound herself, but she was astonished when she had wounded others. Her beautiful neck and her fine eyebrows had a waving motion as if she were about to say: "I should think it might have been done in another way."

Yet she had been a glorious child, sensitive, ab-

stracted, with no knowledge that others existed. When her sister Luna was already skilled at dusting and bed-making Marfa would be unaware of either, would be preoccupied, idle, or ferociously engaged in spilling perfume or pasting her hands with lotions and powders. When they were given sweetmeats Luna would run to her mother like a little demon, hoping to win favor by asking if they might have some, but Marfa would eat at once, and forget. When she saw the lights of the town at a distance she would say, "See the Christmas-tree"; but Luna would say no, that those were the arc-lamps. When it was related that a little boy had "broken his legs, both legs," Marfa suddenly giggled — a giggle compounded of a desire to escape from this knowledge and a sense of the ludicrous leg repetition. But Luna looked indignant and said: "Marfa! The poor little boy." Marfa could not be "punished" by the bureaucracy — deprivations, denials, early-to-bed, these she seemed not to notice. She was thinking of something else.

By the time that she was twelve, however, she was thinking much of others as they affected herself, and usually adversely. . . . Passing on, as she was, in search of standards of the fitting, the agreeable, the beautiful, her first technic was that

of perpetual rejection. This technic endured for a long time.

And now it was observed that almost everything that she did turned out badly. She walked off the end of the veranda, as if she were treading the air, and struck and lamed the dog lying beneath. By accident she tripped others, destroyed their property, broke dishes, lost heirlooms, tore the frocks of her playmates, tumbled babies about and set them screaming. She accidentally pinched fingers in doors, let objects fall on feet, tore precious books, marred furniture, and wounded every one with whom she had anything to do. She caused endless annoyance by forgetting to deliver messages, by bringing wrong articles from the shops. Mud puddles, round which Luna daintily stepped, Marfa plashed through, wetting every one. As she grew older these accidents increased in violence. Indirectly she occasioned the death of the house-dog; she drove a pony which ran away, injuring her mother. She set a jack-o'-lantern in a neighbor's window and burned up his porch. She dressed as a ghost and frightened a pregnant woman, whose child was born dead that night.

But every one forgot and forgave her, because she had her beauty. Of her glorious childhood,

beauty remained to her. Not a formal beauty, but an indescribable air, as if light and fragrance poured from her; or poured upon her, moving with her. No one succeeded in putting this in words. One looked at another and said, "Isn't Marfa . . ." and the other agreed. Something faint like smoke, or clear like light, or dry and cloudy like pollen, seemed to move with her, not palpable but powerful. Perhaps an energy, perhaps a perfume. For some this was too intense, and these disliked her with violence. Her family masked their love with disapproval.

Marfa Manchester, that little point of being in a sea of being, regarded herself as an island of being in a sea of non-being. She was a tiny unit of sensation, violently functioning and finding herself the center of an almost empty universe. She struck out violently, hurt herself, hurt every one else.

Now the list of the devastations of her twenty-four years had culminated in the death of Paul Barker. She nursed this horror as she sat on the screen porch, waiting for Mr. Bartholomew.

Mr. Manchester and Mr. Bartholomew alighted from the limousine, came into the screened porch beyond the *porte-cochère*. Mr. Manchester's trim

long legs bent visibly at the knees as he stepped, and his spine curved stiffly backward, so that his figure would have been markedly full in front had there been any figure there. His presentation of Mr. Bartholomew was leisurely and sane . . . no jest, no assumption of lightness, no excitement, no desire to impress this guest, no "side." Marfa and Luna smiled and murmured; Mrs. Manchester said with enormous distinctness, "We are very glad to . . ." and let it go. She rose; her fresh coloring, grayish hair, and tortoise spectacles suddenly emerged; she looked at chairs.

Marcus Bartholomew, his feet nicely together, bowed with gravity, his eyes, as his head inclined, not leaving the ladies, so that, by reason of strips of white showing beneath the iris, his expression was one of unmoved sadness. He looked about, selected, with an air of considered choice, a chair, and said: "This is very delightful." His voice was low and not only had been electrically charged by nature but seemed to have picked up innumerable iron filings and thus to have a surface surpassing fur by many grades of substance. He drew a deep breath, and it was as definite as words — the slow intake, the cæsura, the velvety recession. It was to be seen that it was his

breathing which surcharged his words. And when he looked about on every lady in her turn, his considering gaze, a leisurely tribute, bore that same current of both breath and words. Short, thick, sad, contained, he was a vortex. The Vortex said no more.

The summer afternoon flowed round them in a moment's silence: wind, voices, wheels, chirp of English sparrows, gush and whir of a sprinkling-cart. Into various geometrical patterns occasioned by invisible containers the sun poured, and shadows raked the road. In the beautiful hollow of the afternoon the four sat, while powerful currents of relationship and of unfamiliarity beat upon them all. Among the family there played currents of the associate, the recognized; but upon and from the stranger there rayed the unknown, the potential, the enchanted. And there was in his chin a deep cleft, and his hand upon his knee was brown and powerful.

Before any one had shattered the moment by an image, Marfa rose. She crossed the porch, passed Mr. Bartholomew's chair, and touched the electric door-bell. The sound stirred in the depths of the crouching house, like the purr of a tiger; and while she waited for the maid Marfa returned, stood before Mr. Bartholomew, and asked

"Will you have tea, orange-juice, grape-juice, lemonade?" He rose, bowed, met her eyes, said, "Tea, please," and continued to look at her mildly, adding: "Though I don't, you know, insist on anything." To these words he brought the concentration of one addressing an audience, so that Marfa had an impression of looking at him very near at hand. She stood still and caught a dilation of the pupils of Mr. Bartholomew's eyes, as if he were frightened. The negro maid came; Marfa sat down and said, "Tea, Erralee"; the exotic name sounded on the air unrelated, like a bell, and Mr. Bartholomew observed: "You have named her for an apartment-house or for a princess. Was that so that you may have something unreal about your home?" There was an instant of silence; then Mrs. Manchester, who had been reabsorbed by her surroundings, said distinctly: "What was that?" Mr. Manchester said: "No, no. That's her real name." Luna laughed and cried: "How quickly you found us out!" And Marfa met Mr. Bartholomew's eyes and smiled and said nothing. She was thinking: "Now, in that minute, he knows us all. But he knows me best."

Luna served the tea, not as the eldest, but because her mother asked every one many times

about cream and lemon and sugar. Marfa helped, played the accompaniment, as it were. Her hat was off, she knew that her smoky hair, her pallor, set off the amber and black of her sister; only, she thought, Luna had no body, or no more than one that was tense and that never moved save as a unit. But Luna had once observed of Marfa that she handed tea with her whole body, made of the cup a signal, of the lemon an invitation, of a second cup an intrigue; and had looked puzzled when Marfa looked pleased, until Marfa explained: "I feel so remote and detached that I'm happy to know I ever seem human!" Luna had stared and said dryly: "Human. That's not human. That's the point." Marfa now served Mr. Bartholomew from a silver tray, and as he took lemon and two lumps his eyes fell on Marfa's hands on the tray's edge of silver roses and acanthus leaves; hands slender, fragile, ringless, inconceivably small; not helpless, but quick, firm, directed. "My God," said Mr. Bartholomew softly, "look at those hands!" Marfa was startled, gave the tray to Luna, sat down without her own cup. "What's the matter?" Mr. Manchester asked, and Marfa looked at Mr. Bartholomew as he apologized. "I've done something with photography," he said; "I never saw such hands.

Has she had her portrait painted? ” . . . as if, by this third person, this addressing of the male head of the house, his apology were made valid. “ Don’t apologize,” said Luna; “ every one praises Marfa’s hands. They’re not human hands at all.” Marfa now raised her eyes to their guest. “ They’re horribly hard to find gloves for,” she confessed, and took a cup from Luna, who did not take tea but held her own hands tensely on the arms of her chair. Marcus Bartholomew said, “ No one would ever forget those hands,” and Marfa thanked him and looked down with an air of embarrassment which she did not know whether or not she felt. Into the pretty moment Mr. Manchester crashed, saying roundly: “ These cakes are too rich for me.” As in a fixed loyalty to their father Marfa lowered her eyes. It was Luna the faint detached amusement of whose glance crossed the expressionless look of Marcus Bartholomew.

Not until Erralee the exotic had taken the tea-things did Louis Manchester burst out, as if he had been dreading to do so: “ You know . . . I can’t take it in. Bella . . . girls! Mr. Bartholomew wants me to join the Field museum expedition.” “ To China,” Mr. Bartholomew explained, and Mr. Manchester looked as if this word had

been produced too soon. Marfa, bending forward with an ash-tray, laughed indulgently. "What use would you be there, darling?" she asked. Her father's unresentful eyes looked through the screen to a distant place. "Not any," he said; "but, Lord, what it would mean! . . ." "Don't younger men usually go?" Marfa next asked Mr. Bartholomew, who said without expression: "I'm forty. Your father's not fifty." "Three years past," said Louis Manchester heavily. "Mother," said Marfa, "fancy father galloping off to China." Mrs. Manchester, frowning, trying to take this in, at once fancied as far as she could. "He'd get the fever," said she, but manifestly did not entertain the journey's possibility. Luna alone let her look dwell on her father. "All your poor little specimens and fossils . . . up in your room. Wouldn't it be strange if they'd led to this?" "They've been enough trouble to dust to lead him *somewhere*," said his wife. "But not to China," she added, suddenly growing as positive as if she had just measured the distance.

Louis Manchester sat forward, his knees extending at an acute angle well beyond his chair. His hands with their prominent thumbs thrusting out squarely from their joints, tortured each

other loosely. His staccato was pitched a little high, fell a little loudly: "I'd give anything . . . anything. I've been collecting such stuff for years . . . it was my hunting . . . my holidays. At school it was the same. . . ." "He takes three geological magazines now," Mrs. Manchester bore witness. "Such dull pictures!" "I've had years of correspondence with Garvin, who heads the expedition. . . ." "When Garvin found I knew you in that way, he sent me down to suggest . . ." Bartholomew told it. "It's not the usual expedition . . . it's Garvin's idea. Every man pays his own . . . I've a rough estimate of that . . . we'll be for a year in the interior . . . the objective is beyond the Gobi Desert — some untouched stuff, they tell me. I hope you'll decide to do it." "I don't think papa could stand it," said Marfa thoughtfully. "Hardly anybody could!" Mrs. Manchester cried, defending her lord. "But papa," Marfa reminded her, "always goes beyond his strength . . . does too much. . . ." Mrs. Manchester found herself forced to the other side, declared that he was as strong as anybody, could stand more than most. Mr. Bartholomew said that there would be horses, camels, mules . . . not sure quite what there would be, he mustered the fauna of Asia to make it easy.

"Of course, Marfa," said Mrs. Manchester with hostility.

Marfa continued: "And won't it be horribly expensive? And how long will it take? A whole year! What should *we* do without papa for a whole year?" Luna reminded her: "We were away at school for four years and he did without us." Louis Manchester passed his hand back over his sleek thin hair. "Not to sell a bathtub for a year," he said, but if he was aware of any humor in this he gave no sign . . . could not, in fact, since Bella, Marfa, and Luna Manchester now uttered together what only now presented itself as a consideration: What would become of the business? Louis Manchester said, with a harried look at the floor edges of the porch, that he would have to get some one, have to get some one. "This appeals to me like anything"; he confessed that which was no less apparent than was his head. "I . . ." He drew breath deeply, looked through the screen at a far place, and said no more.

To relieve him, Marcus Bartholomew now began to talk. He had been on one such expedition; two of his men had died and the others had mutinied, but the five white men had controlled eighteen Africans. . . . "What courage you

must have had!" Marfa breathed, and in the same breath: "Papa couldn't stand it. Give up the idea, darling." Detecting signs of strain on Louis Manchester's face, Marcus said: "Manchester, think what it means to have three women care what you do. Not so many care whether my bones bleach in the Gobi Desert, or where." Again the white strips showed beneath the iris of his eyes. Luna's tense hands smoothed at her gown. "No matter how much I cared what papa did," she said, "I'd want him to settle it himself." "So he will," said his wife proudly. Marfa's head dropped; her smoky hair falling about her face, she said: "No . . . I love him too much for that. I want him to do the wise thing, the safe thing, the thing for all our happiness. I couldn't bear to have you go, darling," she said to her father. He muttered: "I can't tell . . . I can't tell," and looked about as if for escape. "I've some maps in my bag . . ." said Marcus alertly. The two men rose, Marcus bowed, and they went indoors with an air of saving themselves from some ambiguous bombardment.

The three women stared at one another. "Let him be, Marfa," said Luna, "and I don't think he'll go." "You can't depend on that," said their mother anxiously. "He used to do a thing any-

way if I opposed him. When I found that out I agreed with him. When he found *that* out he didn't pay any attention to me any longer." She sighed, and suddenly flashed at Marfa: "You mustn't think *you* can run him." "But," Marfa cried, "he must *not* go off to China; he must not!"

Luna rose, her arms held strangely at her sides. "After what happened to Paul Barker through us," she said, "I should think you'd hesitate about arranging things for somebody else." Marfa met this with a breathless: "That's just it! We mustn't *let* papa go right into danger." Luna stood tensely, that rigid figure in queer contrast to her relaxed tone — a tone which appeared to acknowledge that it had never convinced anybody. "Papa's never had very much . . . never had anything that he wanted, really. . . ." "The idea!" cried their mother. She took off her tortoise-rimmed spectacles and with both hands loosened her hair about her face. Five years dropped from her, another five fell as she flushed. Her outraged wifeness seemed to bloom. Papa *had* had something. "Bathtubs," Luna went on. "What does he care, really, about selling anybody bathtubs and lavatories? What could anybody care about that? Who wouldn't rather dig for

anything, anywhere? . . .” “You don’t think of the danger to papa, Luna. . . . It isn’t as if papa were a young man. . . .” Again the outraged wife spoke out: “Papa *is* a young man. At least papa’s not old. . . .” “Do you *want* him to go?” Marfa flashed directly at her. Mrs. Manchester’s flush deepened. “I don’t want him called too old to go. And I guess I’m capable of seeing to things here. I don’t want him run by his own daughter. No, of course I don’t want him to go.” These conflicting utterances lay on the air together, mingling with one another as associatively as wind, voices, wheels, the gush and whirl of the sprinkling-cart on its return. “He won’t go,” said Marfa only. She sat looking down at the tile, the tip of her tongue teasing at her lip. Indignant rejoinders from mother or sister she nullified by an upward look to the wire screening, a look held there, her teeth catching her lower lip; she had, it seemed, dismissed papa. “What’s Mr. Bartholomew’s first name?” she asked.

These three, whose thought had been flowing out fluid from the form of them, as if form demanded again to express itself in essence, even as it had moved before breath had received form, these three fell silent, sank back into form alone. But the thought of the three went on, phials of

the unexpressed, of the "inactual," pulsing in separate centers. The walls of the flesh rose up round the three, and two had once been enclosed within the walls of the mother. Now she was one, and they were two, and she seemed less than either. All were intent on little sacs of being in which floated — differently evoked, differently combined, differently touched with life — the images of papa, China, camels, fossils, and Mr. Bartholomew's first name; perhaps, too, the pale image of Paul Barker.

Marcus Bartholomew stayed for dinner and at dinner he mentioned his country place, spoke of it deprecatingly but tenderly, said that he must either sublet or sell. Marfa and Luna were listening — but not Louis Manchester, whose gaze, wandering and punctuated by swift winking, denoted its inward paths; and not Mrs. Manchester, to whom the offices of hostess meant no more than a running questionnaire on supplies. Marcus said, in his sad, fixed way, that he had a garden, that he had a grove with a little native growth of pine, that the old house was not bad. "You'll hate giving that up," said Luna. She was looking well in green muslin, who was still young enough to be by green vividly enhanced and not merely restored, or even repaired. Marcus said gratefully

yes, but after China he might go on round, spend some time in the British Museum, and drop down into Italy and Sicily; had never had the time for archæology and might "get into some tomb-work." Marfa shook back her smoky hair and asked: "Why dig down like that? Aren't we enough for you — we others, above ground?" Marcus tapped the tablecloth with his powerful brown fingers and after an appreciable pause observed: "How very small you look in white, Miss Marfa!" She caught again that old dilation of his pupils, as if he were frightened. She wondered: "Has he never then cared for any one above ground?" As if the thought rushed from her not invisibly but in powerful obvious currents, she felt her face flush, the air about her change, and some bright frail bridge span the space between her and him. But of this bridge he appeared unaware, merely went on eating an unconscionable number of salted almonds, but not as if he saw them. "A dollar a pound," Marfa thought indignantly. "I shall feed him salted peanuts." And at this thought, which had so lightly run across the bright bridge lately woven between them, she felt a pang of intense excitement, as if some inner wall had caved in at the touch of a wrecker. Salted peanuts! Was it possible?

"Of course," said Louis Manchester, "anybody could sell bathtubs. But it needs somebody to go in there and take hold."

"I've been thinking, papa," said Luna, "that I could do that."

"Luna, good heavens!" said Marfa.

"I know the stock," Luna went on. "I really know the business pretty well. I could go in, papa, till you got back — I know I could."

"Do you know," Marfa asked, "that you're encouraging papa to risk his life?"

She looked anxiously at their father, as if visibly his life were suspended there at the table by a web. Luna looked at him, too. "That lets you out," she said low.

Louis Manchester regarded his daughter Luna with excitement. "I'll bet she could do it," he addressed some invisible power, and muttered: "That'll settle the whole thing." "Mama," said Marfa, "Luna is going to *push* papa down to China." ". . . cannot get her to chill the plates for the salad," Mrs. Manchester went on with her giant preoccupation. She made room for China finally with: "Well, papa isn't going." Bartholomew led the talk away from Manchester, and back to that country house of his. "Some fine old woodwork. I'd like it," he added shyly,

"if you'd all come down and spend a day with me there. Like to show you about . . ." he tapered off, with the engaging manner of the strong and confident creature abruptly assailed by the fear that his suggestion is untimely. Marfa saw his suggestion bleeding briskly in his face. "Papa," she said, "to-morrow is Sunday. Couldn't we drive Mr. Bartholomew home?" Her brazen directness appeared to charm the guest. He said nothing, even kept his look turned from Manchester, regarded Marfa with those uplifted eyes, the chin lowered as in listening. "Why not?" said Louis Manchester; "then we can thresh this thing out. Can you go, Bella?" "Yes. Where?" said Bella. "*Not* those forks, Erralee." "Papa, darling," Marfa cried, "do give it up to-night. I can't sleep with this hanging over us." Louis Manchester looked over at Bartholomew. His look seemed to say: "I doubt if I make it." "I'll have to try to convince you, Miss Marfa," said Bartholomew.

And when they returned to the screened porch he sat beside her on the willow couch and said: "Now, Miss Marfa, you convince me first." Luna said: "Papa, I have it all planned out . . ."; led him aside; and he put his arm about her. Mrs. Manchester unfolded the evening pa-

per. "I'll see," she said, "if I can't find him another revolution over there. That ought to settle this thing." Luna looked over her shoulder: "Whose side are you on anyway, mama?" she inquired. "I'm on my own side," said Mrs. Manchester. "Papa's not going." "Papa might," said Louis Manchester gravely. He cleared his throat, settled his shoulders, and the staring, babylike abstraction of groundless defiance arched his eyebrows and slanted his gaze — gaze without seed. Night with a thousand eyes went on indifferently about them — the rush and wheel of motors, planets, passion, bridge parties, domesticity, crime. Of all these Marfa was unaware, as she was unaware of the caldrons that were her father and her sister, and the quiet caldron of her mother. But Marcus Bartholomew, was he, her intense passivity seemed to say, was he a caldron?

Luna and her father playing with the idea, and Bella Manchester finding a revolution, left the two on the willow couch in public seclusion. Marfa thought: "Forty. But I've never seen a man so . . ." While he talked of his former expedition she pictured him: not in a helmet, riding a camel, not clinging to a burro outlining a precipice, not waist-deep in green water and seeking something unpronounceable; but

otherwise she pictured him: twitching a chair into place before a hearth, opening letters in slant morning sunlight, brushing his hair. "Don't you see," he said, "the expedition isn't the thing, really? There are a lot of hard days and nights to that. It isn't even finding anything that matters. It's going after something that one has always wanted . . . and it's . . . it's getting away. *You* ought to see that. How'd you like to get away?" "Oh, I intend to get away," said Marfa. "Well, can't you see that your father . . ." "But dad did get away. He married and got away. . . ." "Don't you know that life is just getting away, one time after another . . . and always getting back in. Or getting in again." This she did not weigh. "It's not the same," she affirmed, "when you're not young." "But your father is young. Don't make him old." "He's fifty-three," she confided, the heightened arch of her eyebrows measuring it off. He squared about and looked at her, his eyes showing their thin white half-moons as he dropped his head and studied her. "You're not very modern, are you?" She lifted an eyebrow: "Why aren't I?" "You don't see adventure as a legitimate part of everybody's life." She was nettled, took refuge in: "I love my father." "That's nothing to do

with it." "Yes, it has!" "If you love him, let him be." "Is that a proof of love?" He replied leisurely, "That depends," and suddenly seemed to lose interest in her, turned to listen to Luna and her father. Marfa made another bid to rescue the minute from the slough of general conversation. "Sometimes you have to protect the person you love. A man ought to know that." He presented his profile, took on a bored abstraction, said: "One reason love's rather sick is that there's been too much protecting." "Is love sick?" Marfa pursued. "You ought to know," he explained, his eyes on her father. "Did I make it so?" "You're in a fair way to, if you insist on being one of these protecting women. Women who are constantly protecting their men from getting their own way. . . ." "Do you think I'm like that?" "I think only what I see. Be honest! Do you want father to have his own way, or do you want him on the expedition?" He brought his attention back to her, considered her boldly from head to foot. "Why don't you join the expedition too?" he said, rose, strolled across to Mrs. Manchester, sat down by her side, and inquired whether she had found a satisfactory revolution. She said: "No, but I see that the best thing for cleaning mirrors is clear water."

Marfa noticed with interest that she was trembling; thought, "I've never felt exactly like this for any one"; thought that she hated this Mr. Bartholomew. Who was he, anyway? If the rest drove him to his home the next day, she should make some excuse. He didn't appreciate her, hadn't an idea what she was like, was wrapped up in his old expedition, wanted to sacrifice father. And Luna egging father on. Could it be that Luna was trying to please this Mr. Bartholomew? Desiring to hurt some one, Marfa rose and strolled into the house. They could fight it out; she was going to bed. She saw the piano, with one lamp burning above it, turned to the music-room, touched the piano, and her notes went calling and calling. . . . Without even a decent interval, she said to herself, he followed her, came and sat in a deep chair at the end of the piano, did not look at her, but sat with his head held forward and with his air of listening. She was playing a Rachmaninoff prelude, but when she had finished Marcus said: "Don't you know anything farther back? Don't you know Schubert's 'Serenade'?" She watched her hands running over the keys and said: "You're not modern either, then." He didn't trouble to answer, said impatiently: "Go on, go on, please." He listened

in the most flattering fashion, the tips of his fingers moving a little on his closed eyes, and he did not change this pose when she had finished, and he said: "Could you possibly do that right over again?" She played the serenade again, thought proudly: "I *am* trembling, and I thought I was so . . ." He rose and walked out of the room, went back toward the porch, saying only: "Thank you. There's nothing better." She played on for a time, thought better of going to bed, made some drinks, and rejoined the others.

Before they separated for the night it had been arranged that they should drive back with Mr. Bartholomew next morning. Mr. Manchester cried, in a manner of escaping, that they would go. Mrs. Manchester breathed that she didn't know, really. Luna said tensely that she ought to stay at home. Marfa thought: "He wants me to go, so he asks us all!" Mr. Bartholomew observed that he was sorry they would be too early for the peonies.

It was ninety miles to Mr. Bartholomew's home and they were to reach there for lunch. They were well on their way when he said: "I took the liberty of calling Mrs. Bartholomew

from my room this morning. She's expecting us at one. That'll give us time to call on Garvin first—he's at his summer home at Nashotah." He went on talking about Garvin.

Marfa thought: "Mrs. Bartholomew. I hadn't thought of her. I don't know why I should think of her now." She looked down at Bartholomew's hand on his knee—an insensitive hand, save for the sensitive finger-tips, as if nature had done badly by him and then had repented. Beyond his hand on his knee were Luna's hands, tense on her lap, hands long, loosely gloved, as stiff as the hands of the dead, arranged by another. Luna was saying nothing this morning. And also in the dress which she wore there was the despair of knowledge that it was Marfa and not she who had been chosen. "And yet she agreed with him," Marfa thought, "sided with him from the first. And I fought him. . . ." Why had she done that? Did she care whether papa went to China or not? She looked at papa's narrow head, his ears flaring out beneath his brown cap, his high spare shoulders and his manner of driving with his elbows, and she knew that she did not care in the least whether papa went to China, or anywhere. Not that she didn't love him. She merely didn't care whether or not he went. She had been

fighting not papa but this stranger. "Careful, Louis, there's a curve," said her mother for the thirtieth time. How wonderful, Marfa thought, it would be if mama would go to China too! Mama was thin. Her eyebrows were lifted in perpetual deprecation. She was constantly saying that something might be better. What ailed mama? She used to be so round and plump and thick and smooth and pink. And Luna — Luna looked terrible today. Not amber, but a dense buff. "Why don't you go to China with papa, Luna?" Marfa asked. Luna looked straight ahead, those motionless hands brazed to her lap. "I haven't been asked," she said, and puckered her mouth unbecomingly as a sign of coquetry. "The expedition would be delighted," said Marcus Bartholomew.

Marfa felt his arm against her arm, as he sat there between them. How warm and vital and present he was. She would have liked to think, and did not know how to think, that he was as if innumerable cells of being had come flowing together, every one separately charged, and the explosion had wrecked nothing but had instead produced him, whole, who kept on in a series of gentle explosions as his way of life — soft exhausts, as from an engine. No one could be near

him and not be shaken by his pleasant violence. Yet he sat so quietly, saying little, hardly moving, his hand resting on his knee for miles and miles. Why did he want to go away off to China?

Having thus disposed of all her family and of Marcus Bartholomew, Marfa came to Mrs. Bartholomew after all. Why did there have to be one? Yet of course one wouldn't like him to have lived unmarried until he was forty — one couldn't have felt toward him the same. Forty. He must have been married for fourteen years . . . he was the sort that marries young. She wondered if he had children, who were in the room when he drew up his chair, opened his mail by breakfast-light, or sometimes even when he brushed his hair. Well, he would be charming with children. "Father . . ." they would say, and he would bend his head stiffly and say "M . . . m," without any expression. . . . Marfa was aware of a deep inner glow; she traced it back, beyond his possible children, to her recognition of the fact that he must have been married for, say, fourteen years. "Time enough to have tired of her," she brought out her thought nakedly. She felt new energy, a tremor of pleasure in the rushing road, the thick, rich green of the boughs, the blue of the sky drawn upward

to some undividable core. She thought: "How nice this is! And I'm so able to handle it — get the most of it. I can handle him, too. He'd do anything for a woman — give up anything and not even know he was giving it up. He doesn't need to sit with his arm like that. There's plenty of room. I don't believe he's crowding Luna." She tried to see. Luna was sitting with her chin lifted, her eyes on the road. "Poor Luna," Marfa thought. She breathed her deep content.

Mr. Garvin's stone house lay in a sleepy valley on an alert little lake. While Manchester and Bartholomew went in, the ladies sat in the car. "Remember, papa dear, to tell him you're not going," Marfa said, and looked at Bartholomew, but he gave no sign. Marfa now said rapidly to her mother and sister that these grounds were as neat and clipped as tapestry, that the pergola and bridge looked cut from wall-paper, and that the flowers were incubator flowers. She wished that she had waited to say all this until Bartholomew came back, wondered if she could say it again without prefacing it with "I just said," decided that otherwise her mother would unconsciously give her away, and cried: "Mama, darling, you're looking beautiful." "What makes

you so nervous, Marfa?" Luna asked gravely. Marfa said that she was not, she was not, nervous. "Well, I couldn't see why you would be," Luna said. Marfa murmured, "Papa . . . China . . ." and sighed. Suddenly Luna's expression became one of intense tenderness, as for a little child, and she leaned forward and put an arm about Marfa and murmured: "Sister." Marfa's body was tense, as if she suspected compassion. "Do call me by my name," she said frowning, then relented and patted her sister's hand. "I wish I'd used fox instead of squirrel for my collar," said Mrs. Manchester. Marfa cried: "Mama! When papa may be in there doing the most foolish thing of his life. . . ." "Papa's not going," said Mrs. Manchester.

They waited for half an hour. Then the two men reappeared and with them Max Garvin, a man with arms, shoulders, and head all a little blunted, a little worn down; and the edge was gone too from his glance. But he was smiling, was presented to the ladies, his smile widening, and said impressively:

"I am delighted that Mr. Manchester has decided to join us on our little trip."

Unaware of the utter devastation caused by his casual announcement, Mr. Garvin regretted

that his sister was not at home, that he had not known that they were in the car, that there had not been more rain. . . . "I'll leave you those volumes when I'm driving through next week," he said to Manchester, and was left saluting as the car took the drive.

Marcus Bartholomew leaned toward Marfa, laid his hand for a moment over hers. "Let your father be," he seemed to say. Luna's hands were stiffly moving. Mrs. Manchester began a rushing stream of speech, directed at her lord.

Hills lifted and fell, carrying with them their gray roads and tossing the motor like a boat on lifted and lowered water. The air went in gentle volumes driven by no wind. It was true that air, motion, green, blue, and distance were intoxicants, but the true intoxicant was none of these. It was rather that which lay within all: the core of the color, the face behind the distance, the resolving of movement into rhythm, and that mysterious entrance of life, naked and nameless, through the lungs. The five in the car partook of all this unconsciously, after the manner of men, and concentrated on the fact that Louis Manchester, very red in the ears beneath his cap, was about to go to China. Mrs.

Manchester's words could not be heard on the back seat — save jagged jets of "widow," "wild," and "when we were first married, if I had known . . ." Mr. Manchester merely permitted the speedometer to mount, but once he said: "Wheee!" He might have been experiencing the threshold of freedom, as one who has just died.

On the back seat Marfa sat silent. She was thinking: "Why doesn't he look at me?" She was thinking: "I wish I'd worn my green crape." She was thinking: "The back of mama's hat is wrong." Aloud she said: "A whole year! Mama and Luna and I may be dead for months when papa comes back — oh, look at the rabbit!" She bit her lip. "You aren't thinking of him," said Marcus shortly. "And is Mrs. Bartholomew," Marfa outrageously asked, "thinking of you?" The face of Marcus Bartholomew did not change. "Are not wives," he advanced, "always thinking of husbands?" "And husbands? . . ." she said, but he said didactically: "Your thought makes a jest by parallel, but such jests are not so good as jests by contrast." He was absent, unsmiling, said immediately that real-estate values about the lakes were criminally high, and talked about these uninterestingly. They plunged between hugely

columned trees and among hills chiselled against a sky already whitening to noon.

Order — flawless order. Looking about Marcus Bartholomew's home Marfa thought that she could never compete with its flawless order; thought that order in the homes of the poor might merely stress the stiff, the scant, but in a stately home it shared the beauty of order in a grove, on the sea, on a sky of clouds meticulously composed.

They were waiting in the drawing-room. Mrs. Bartholomew had not yet appeared, but her aroma had entered before her. In an interior which seemed to concentrate light, vigor, gaiety, there was a certain nobility, less of a room than of a garden, everything still, low, dreaming; and this air must come, Marfa decided, from Mrs. Bartholomew. But when that tall woman, laughing at nothing, entered her own drawing-room, Marfa could not combine her with the room. "So good of you to come," Mrs. Bartholomew incredibly said, "on my husband's invitation. I'm delighted." "So good of you to be delighted," Marfa said, and presented her mother and Luna, and thought: "Mama ought to have done this, mama has no idea of what . . . and how stiffly

Luna holds her hands! ” Mrs. Bartholomew began to talk about her cook. Marfa thought: “ This tall woman, laughing at nothing, talking about her cook — poor Mr. Bartholomew,” and felt monstrous elation.

That same spacious air of a garden lay upon the dining-room, large, light, tended, the plates like flowery patches, the *épergne* a flowery fountain, both table and room formal and planted and unconfused, all airy and colored and allied to space. They sat down, Mrs. Bartholomew still talking about the cook. “ I told her,” said Mr. Bartholomew, “ to make fruit cocktails.” Instantly Marfa thought: “ The rooms, the table, the house express *him* — not her! ” “ It isn’t as though I hadn’t trained her,” Mrs. Bartholomew was saying. Her husband interrupted her as if he were always obliged to do so in order to insert speech at all: “ Garvin has a wonderful collection. I wish there’d been time . . . ” “ He’s crazy about geological specimens,” Mrs. Bartholomew explained Mr. Bartholomew to the table. The fruit cocktails came in. “ So sorry they weren’t on the table when we came out,” she pursued. “ This cook is the slowest creature imaginable. . . . ” She laughed heartily and pursued the cook.

Marfa looked at Mr. Bartholomew, sitting at

the head of his table, his head low between his shoulders, strips of white showing beneath the iris of his eyes. "Poor dear," she thought, "it's plain why he's going to China." "I always tell Mr. Manchester," said Mrs. Manchester, "that Erralee — that's our maid — colored — so pert . . ." "And *that's* why papa's going," Marfa thought. The talk raged on. Mr. Bartholomew obviously addressed Mr. Manchester, Marfa did not listen to him, and Luna, one long hand laid on the table's edge, ate, her downcast lashes laid stiffly on her cheeks. No one's spirit came even briefly to its window to meditate: That if a huge hand could have thrust through the walls, picked up the table in a vast pink palm, and if great eyes could have looked down from the immeasurable height of a giant head, six small centers of emotion would have been visible, pulsing like boiling jelly, and no thought would have been manifest. Strange, pale walls of being, flow of color in cheeks, flutter of breath, stream of words so recently devised by the lips of the animal — and not a thought yet visible. Or that any giant might have dropped the little table in distaste: "What! All these years and still so few thoughts, and none of those few evident, none of them flooding out in airy shapes and colors

from those round heads with their moist and moving eyes, their red and mobile lips? What a backward system! . . . Thought, the dynamic of the planet, and none of it to be seen! " Or that a more patient giant might reflect on electricity delaying for eons to be visible save as it shot through the clouds; and it might yet be that thought, emerging from the formless, and even through such dynamos as those six heads, would radiate visibly upon a world.

Meanwhile no thought was visible, nor was it audible save in such a word as " fossil." One thing more Marfa needed: was there the bond of the child? " Your children? " she said tentatively to Mrs. Bartholomew. Mrs. Bartholomew diminished. " We have had none," she said, with the flame of her quenched. Marfa thought: " ' We have none ' would wring one's heart. ' We have had none ' sounds gross. Mrs. Bartholomew would say: ' We have had none. ' " Marfa murmured. Momentarily Mrs. Bartholomew gazed wide-eyed into her finger-bowl. The only time, Marfa felt, that Mrs. Bartholomew's spirit ever came briefly to its window was to say so grossly: " We have had none." Marfa thought, " He should have had a son," and felt her monstrous elation.

They went into the garden, and with no circumlocution Marcus walked by her side. He said nothing, merely paced there, hands in pockets, head lowered, eyes level in that passionate sadness of their white half-moons. Marfa thought, "Already he can keep still with me," and herself kept still. They paused before a Judas-tree in its fine, thin soprano of bloom; he glanced sidewise at her, smiling; she met his eyes, smiled too, said nothing, looked. Noting that neither meant to speak, the Moment assumed the burden and pulsed between them. She caught its pulse, in its rhythm moved up the path. They took the turn of the whole garden without a word, and she was feeling some irritation lest, after all, he was thinking about the expedition, when he said: "There'll be some matters about the expedition to settle. I may be obliged to run over a time or two to confer with your father. Shall you be there?" She said: "I'm sorry that I can't be sure. . . . I have some visits planned. . . ." She thought: "Liar. And fool. To want to be chased. . . ." Marcus observed: "We shall have no hollyhocks this year. They were killed out."

THE Manchesters' house had belonged to Mrs. Manchester's father, who — a clergyman — had built to adjoin his study a tiny chapel, no larger than a cell. It had one bench, a *prie-dieu*, and an altar — above which hung a passable oil of "Behold, I Stand at the Door." Charged for two generations with the current of those in prayer or meditation, this place had not yet lost its voltage, even though it was never used. Mrs. Manchester was too busy; Luna, who looked as if she would frequent it, called it the vault; and to Marfa the place never even occurred, save semioccasionally, when she was in some sorrow. But on her return home that night, and on going to the study, now the den, for a book, she paused before the door of the chapel, never heated, never lighted, and lifted the latch. A breath, cold, close, came out of the darkness. She shook open her matches, lit a candle on the altar, threw up the narrow window, sat down. Instant stillness folded her. The place had the silence of the unused, the deserted, the dead. The motionless became the positive; empty air became affirmative. Some in-

ner core of the place opened and let her in. She passed from the mere stillness into a tremble of the vibration of all space raying into the little room, unvexed by the radiations of any used articles. She began herself to tremble with the onslaught of this terrific silence which was alive and pulsing. Even then her attention did not leave herself.

"Now I'm Marfa," she thought. "Now I'm really Marfa. . . ."

To herself she now felt untroubled and smooth, nothing pricking, stinging, goading, teasing. She herself was beaten upon by nothing, was free to go out and move in slow spirals about this charged stillness. She felt herself exploring it, feeling its textures, its many textures, its curves and surfaces of pulsing molecules. Her eyes went to the window and her thought streamed into the darkness, feeling the fine waves of space meeting the fine waves of the little room. But all this she received as emotion which released her to enter in and in, to herself. She breathed deeply, felt herself to fill the air about her with her expiration, felt no difference between herself, the air of the room, and the darkness washing against the open window and retreating before the soft volleys of her candle-light.

Very slowly all this flowing and beating of the silence worked itself through her physical envelope and into her understanding. Not her mind — Marfa knew that her mind was not good for much, and never received anything unique. But it was as if something else within her, which need not form words, began to reply to the pulsing stillness by a pulsing stillness of its own. As if the molecules without her were able to impress some body within her, independently of the use of words. So she "thought" (but with no words):

"I shall do everything well. I shall harm no one. I shall move through my life shining."

Wind blew the candle-flame, and the line where the candle-flame met the darkness wavered like a scarf. Marfa straightened, rose, feeling bathed, feeling as if she had been running. That little breath of wind, producing obvious motion, seemed to have changed the quality of the silence, as if finer vibration withdrew before the coarser. Rising, Marfa saw on the altar a rectangular white surface leaning against the wall. She lifted it, and it was a photograph of Paul Barker. Luna must have brought it there, none knew why. Marfa held it and sank down on the *prie-dieu*.

Paul, whom she had killed. He had come up to town from his university where he had toiled

through his law course. Thirteen years of schooling. Twenty-two years of hopes and plans. His mother and father sending him up to town with the money that they could spare. . . . (And he "all they had.") Then she took him to call on Stella and there was no more of him. Diphtheria from that house, death from Stella's house, with its huge floor-cushions and its rich copper lamps. In a week he had been dead. Not Stella, not the doctor, not Luna and her orange bathing-cap — but she, Marfa, killing Paul. Her green georgette gown she had wanted Stella to see, had wanted Stella to see Paul, with his jests and his blue eyes and his good clothes and his love for her. Paul had loved her at once, she had wanted to show to Stella Paul, his love for her, and to show the green gown. So she had killed Paul by taking him to Stella's.

"How could you let me do that?" She hugged Paul's picture and stared up at the oil above the altar. Her sense of God and of Jesus and of the Christ lay in her as she had received them at adolescence. She stared at the knocking figure accusingly, felt crude to be thus accusing him. Had he called Paul to himself and used her as the instrument? But he had no right, God had no right! No, no. It wasn't God. It was she and her

pride and her green dress. A month ago Paul was alive, hoping, happy.

Now she saw his cravat as it had looked in his coffin. What should she do who was so wicked that her pride and vanity had killed Paul? . . .

She said over what she would do: "God, I will do right. I will do right. I swear it. I will do right. . . ."

Something thumped on the wall outside. She sprang up, shut the window smartly, let fall the photograph, blew out the candle, and ran into the den.

In the morning sunlight she came down-stairs with a sense of entering life with vigor because something important had happened. She thought that it was the hour in the cell, that she would go there often to sit alone with Paul's picture, that everything would be different.

Luna was crossing the hall, dressed for the street. Mr. Manchester had just brought the car round. "I'm to begin getting my hand in the business," Luna said, with a glint. Marfa cried: "Luna — you don't really think papa'll go?" Luna said tranquilly: "He's going. Mama's reconciled. Now don't stir up things, Marfa."

Marfa lifted her hand to her father, watched them drive away, thought: "Yesterday in the car I *wanted* him to go. That was wrong. I know that he's not strong, that he hasn't courage, hasn't endurance. I must want him not to go, just as I said at first." Her mother would be useless in this; their family physician would be useless because his advice was invariably against taking risks; she thought of their friends — the Montes, who were always urging him to travel, the Barrets, who were incredibly thrifty, Mr. Bells, who never let anything interfere with business. The Montes would encourage her father and the others he would discount. She thought, "I am alone in this. I shall have to have judgment for us all . . ." and she felt that she had the judgment. But somebody must help her to make her father see reason. If only Mr. Bartholomew could see reason himself . . . Mr. Bartholomew. Perhaps he could be made to see reason. . . .

She looked him up at once in the Chicago telephone-book. She could go in for shopping, go and reason with Marcus Bartholomew; and be at home for dinner. She put in the call from the telephone in the den, had him on the wire as if she had reached into space and twitched his sleeve: Marfa Manchester, who must see him

about something very important. Would he be in his office at noon to-morrow?

His voice came, thick, electric, like substance springing with vital life.

"Can't it be to-day?"

"You'll not be there to-morrow?"

"Of course. I'd make it a point to be. But can't it be to-day?"

Marfa thought: She could catch the ten, be in town by twelve . . . "Half after twelve to-day then." "You'll lunch with me?" "I'm not sure. . . ." "Do lunch with me. But I must know, because I'll have to break an engagement." Marfa said: "Don't break an engagement." His voice came: "I'll break it, on the chance." She sat staring at the door of the cell-room. What had she done? Made a path, built a wall. . . .

Her mother came down the passage with a telegram, and her voice was high and hurried: Aunt Phœbe and Uncle Marshall and Ben and Bessie were coming in a car — they would be here this afternoon. . . . "You must help me. . . ." Marfa said: "Sorry, darling, I'm going to town for all day . . . Luna'll help." "Luna's gone with your father. You can't go!" "Lover, I've just promised. I'll be back for dinner. . . ." The trebles of the two voices rippled on the air like

bright rain on water, almost visibly the vibrations rose and spread, the passage brimmed with them, and they died on a note of: Marfa had promised. The mother wrung her hands like Rachael, like Niobe; and Marfa ran to dress: Her tangerine sports suit, her black hat, her bag from Morocco. She disappeared into a taxi like an oriole into a swinging nest, flashed the fifty miles to town on the express, was set down at the door of Mr. Bartholomew's private office, and faced him thinking: "What have I done?"

Not much, to judge by his indifference.

He was resting his chin on his collar and looking at her with a light frown, when she said without preface: "Mr. Bartholomew, I couldn't tell you yesterday — papa was there. But he's no man to take on a journey. You must help me — you and I together can keep him from it. . . ." Marcus Bartholomew put his head down and listened. His listening was as positive as pleading, or as scorn. ". . . never can even find his place in a book, never can find an address, never can remember a figure or a place or a date or where he has left anything, or what to take if he's sick or . . ." She opened her hands. "You see? And he *is* sick often . . . he eats like a wild man . . . no sense of diet . . . no sense . . ." Her pause

denoted the planetary, the universal. "Papa," she ended, "is a precious. But on such a trip he would be nothing more." Mr. Bartholomew murmured: "We're all like that . . . men. In private life, I mean. It's only publicly that we can locate anything. And not," he sadly added, "often then." She wasn't listening. "He will certainly break his leg or fall off his camel or miss the party and wander into the desert and *die*. . . . Mr. Bartholomew, you don't know what you're letting yourself in for by taking papa." Marcus was three spots of high light . . . his face tilted downward, his hands solidly upon his chair-arms, he sat there motionless, save for the lifting of his eyes with that white curve of cornea. "You love your father very much," he commented ambiguously. "So much," she cried instantly, "that I can't bear it — to have him go. Help me! Together, we can keep him at home. . . ." "You are . . ." he said, and waited for a long time. "You are a very special pleader. Shall we have some lunch?" "Yes," said Marfa, "a stuffed crab. I don't get them at home." "A stuffed crab," he assented, and followed her. She watched his square figure pose on the curb, his square forefinger signalling a taxi. She thought: "He's nothing. Imagine such a man. . . ." But when in the

cab he turned squarely toward her, saying no more than "Where shall we lunch?" she felt herself less than a form of air wavering in heat. She stared at him, saying nothing. He told the man the Edgewater Beach and sat silent. Marfa thought indignantly, "I'm not a child!" — but yet that did not seem to be the exact charge, nor the desired rebuttal.

The table overhung the lake, the surf beat almost upon the hard wood at their feet. The lattices of the walls, the birds in their cages and the sails shining on the blue were to Marfa the mingled properties of a large new place where she sat, and said cantaloupe, salad, ice. For all the high importance of the time, she could recall nothing of the words drifting like vapor between them; could recall only that she saw his collar-button showing a bit beneath his tie, and she wished that it didn't show; and that his wrist curved strangely when he lifted his glass; until he said: "I should find it rather exciting to have you take so much interest in my affairs — if I were your father." She said coldly: "One doesn't have to be my father for me to be interested." "But if it were I that you were urging not to go to China . . ." finally forced her eyes from the waters of Lake Michigan, while she asked, "What

then?" and he concluded gravely: "I'd stay — like a shot." For the first time she let him see her face dissolve with laughter, line, lips, eyes dazzling with laughter. She leaned toward him with, "How long have you known this?" saw him start, and concentrate in that strange look with fear in it before she went on austere: "My father I love very dearly. He's no more fitted for this expedition than — please change your plans in some way so that it won't be possible for him to go. I do beg you. . . ." She thought: "'Very dearly.' 'I do beg you.' What am I talking like that for? Is it because this man seems to me so old-fashioned, so serious, so adorable?" He frowned: "You're asking me something ridiculous. You're asking me something ridiculous. Your father is old enough to look after his own expeditions." She replied: "No man is — my father least of all." They went on about it enjoyably for a long time, prolonging it, making it their playground. At last he said: "How do you suggest that I go about keeping your father at home?" and again she dazzled him, saying: "Stay yourself." He asked: "On *his* account?" She said nothing, looked at him deeply, until he added, "I'll stay on your account," and asked the waiter for the check.

Before the waiter returned, Marcus said to her without expression: "Mrs. Bartholomew has just come into the dining-room. Will you come over with me and speak to her?"

As if this were a party to which had come a new arrival, Marfa said "Delighted," and went with him. She thought: "I might be in a panic. I might feel sorry. I think it's going to be fun." This sentiment she examined, walking across the room swimming in light, flowers, candy-baskets, color; and she thought, "I must be wicked," but she thought it as one having serene knowledge that she wasn't, but was merely playing with the idea. "See," she said to some invisible inner audience, "I'm too fine to be delighted to be wicked. I'd be sorry to be wicked. And I know that I'm not wicked." With a sense of confirmed innocence she stood by that table, and heard Mrs. Bartholomew say: "Really."

Mrs. Bartholomew, erect, handsome, and with the countenance in vogue in 1900, looked an instant of stupefaction, then smiled up at her husband, nodded at her husband, nodded at Marfa, and presented her to a Miss Melander, who bowed uninterrogatively. Marcus said: "Shall I drop back and pick you up in an hour?" "No, thank you," said his wife — but with too much

emphasis, Marfa thought. "We've some things to do"; and she did not include Marfa in the nod on which she returned to her menu-card.

Marfa and Marcus Bartholomew moved on. They sat in the lobby before a fireplace rising in the middle of the floor. "A shrine to fire," Marfa said tranquilly, "on a cathedral scale. And there's a stone drinking-fountain, for a shrine to water." "And we," he said contentedly, "are shrines to earth. But the fourth element is absent, as in any hotel lobby." They spoke of the unnecessary fire, dwelt on it, Marfa presently felt, too elaborately, too consciously. "Tell me," she said abruptly, "whether you think Mrs. Bartholomew minded my lunching with you" . . . and realized that she was not up to passing it over in favor of fire or other neutralities, but that she wanted the quiver of talking about this. He said, "God knows," and Marfa cried: "But I thought she'd be modern and casual. If I'd thought she'd mind, I wouldn't have come here. . . ." He smiled a slow smile, looked somewhere else, and said, "I thought *you'd* be modern and casual," and went on, as if there were no more due that subject: "As I was saying, if you ask me not to go to China, I won't go." "But why on earth should I ask you that?" Marfa cried. "Besides, I don't, of course,

believe you." He lifted his chin over his collar to look round at her, sat unmoved with his sizable arms locked across his sizable chest, and said: "It's the truth. But in that case, would your father give up going? I don't think so." She forgot her father, cried: "I couldn't let you do that. I couldn't think of that, you know." He said almost absently: "I wish to God you wanted *me* to stay." Marfa thought: "It's like a motif — first a little, then more, then . . ." She said stiffly, "We'll get nowhere. You're very good. I'm going now," and did not move. He began to talk, his voice touching its bass, a voice concentrated, its tones dense, deep, colored — what color, what key, dense with what, Marfa wondered. She heard his voice coming out like a supreme pulsing stream of water, thick, monotonous, and splendid. The voice spoke to her without its words, the voice spoke to some dumbness in her which now first answered, or so she thought. "I'm being punished," the voice said. "I've hated men who've gone whining about being lonely. Well, that was because I've never before seen anybody I wanted to whine to. *I'm* lonely, *I'm* half starved, I'm going to China because there's not a thing on earth for me. Unless you'll ask me to stay . . . I mean, unless you'd a little rather *I*

wouldn't go into danger either. . . ." He smiled his odd tortured ugly smile. "I'm trying to get under a corner of your adorable care for your father," he said. "You see, nobody wants me not to go. My wife'll be rather glad of the freedom. This woman she's with . . . I don't like her, they both know that. She's tricky and a sponge. She works my wife . . . well! I was trying to make a life for myself. I thought of China. But if I stayed here and could see you . . ." Marfa looked at the fire, saw it spread its light over carving on stone, carving on wood, roses in a rug, cupids on a wall, leaves on a bowl of light, and said: "Mr. Bartholomew, a girl isn't such a fool as she used to be." She saw that he seemed to be considering the curve of her throat, seemed not to be expecting to consider her words, but he looked up at her now. "Once," she went on, "that would touch her, take her in. . . . the lonely, half-starved husband. She'd sacrifice everything to make it up to him for what he'd lost. She'd let him eat up her life, drink up her life, and not even know he was sacrificing her. You'll not find many girls to do that now—they're too independent." He stared: "Too independent—to fall in love? . . ." Now Marfa said: "That's the first time I've heard you mention love. I didn't know

that had anything to do with what you propose. It usually hasn't — any more." He said low: "What do I propose? . . ." She drew out her vanity-case, used it carefully, leisurely, saying, "A pure and platonic friendship. Spiritual," snapped the case and blazed out at him: "Mr. Bartholomew, you're the sort of man I could have adored. So could any woman. Why do you make yourself so cheap? . . ." Caring nothing for the elderly ladies on the opposite couch, he seized on her hand and shook it. "Marfa," he said, "I'm the sort of man you could adore! You said so! Well, here I am — adore me just enough to let me see you occasionally. . . ." She murmured, but he caught it: "Piffle, Mr. Bartholomew. You're old-fashioned. . . ." He turned on her savagely: "It's you who are old-fashioned! Why did you lunch with me to-day?" "To get you to help me about my father. . . ." He said loudly: "Piffle, Marfa. We both know why we lunched together. We've been pulled toward each other from the minute we met. Be honest. Either that means everything or it doesn't mean anything." She considered for a moment, seemed unable to escape by the door which he had opened, dazzled him once more by her smile, and said: "At least, it must mean something." She thought: "For my

father's sake I mustn't let him go. . . ." He sank into his old pose, thick arms crossed on his thick chest, head down, a rim of white showing beneath the iris. "We nearly quarrelled," he said. Fancy that . . . my quarrelling with the only being on earth who has interested me in years. . . ." She said with a show of humility: "I was nasty. But if you know how bored women get with the rôle you were playing . . ." He said tensely: "You know very well that this is different . . ." but she interrupted him by laughing. He scowled at her, saying: "My Lord, how's a man to tell one of your sort what she means to him — or might mean." She saw the two elderly women looking at her curiously. They were in grays and orchids, and had the refinement that Marfa hated — traditions in every known pattern — yet they gave her once more an abrupt background for the immemorial married man tugging at the leash of his own boredom and begging for life. She said: "You shouldn't have told me. I was terribly excited at the idea of meeting you to-day . . . came away and left my mother with guests almost upon her. But now that you're the same old sort . . . there must be a dozen in there in the dining-room. . . ." He suddenly turned and looked at her strangely: "I believe

you're in earnest," he said. "And if you are . . ."

She was arrested, asked, "What then?" and he said gravely: "If you're that sort — if you really are that sort, then I *would* be in earnest. Of course I can't deny that I wasn't, just now."

Marfa frowned, rose, said: "That won't do, either — pretending you were pretending. I was wrong to have asked your help . . . will you call me a taxi?" He bowed, left her, returned to walk with her to the door, put her in her taxi without another word. She leaned from the door to say: "I'm sorry I troubled you." He answered, "You'll never do anything else," and closed the cab door. "Home," she said, and caught his amused look as he named her station.

Driving down the avenue she asked herself: "What did he mean? What did I mean? Was it all play?" A terrible nostalgia for the simple, the direct, the honest beset her. She saw a baker's cart driven by a sallow youth and thought: "He'd say what he meant. He'd probably be true to his wife no matter how she bored him. And what of that? What's he, after all?" She wept a bit, felt annoyed, felt restless, saw a gray stone church and thought: "I wish I could marry a minister and pray to God all day." But upon reflection this did not seem to be either what she wanted,

nor yet the usual occupation of ministers' wives.

She had taken her place in her train before she realized that all that ailed her was intense and disabling disappointment in the outcome of her adventure. She was half-way to her home before she thought of her father, and that, after all, he was going to China.

Aunt Phœbe and Uncle Marshall and Ben and Bessie had arrived. Marfa thought as she greeted these four: "They are the sort who visit all over. Every atom of them is a guest." Aunt and uncle she kissed with a rush of tenderness — they had looked like this since she was seven, they were gentle, heavy, with no awareness of past or future, no power of co-ordination, no generalizations of the abstract, and nothing else for the concrete — all this Marfa caught as her aunt's thin wrists folded about her, and as her uncle said: "Here's my little girl." They were the aunt and uncle of the world. Bessie, seventeen, manifestly alternated a vast complacency with squirming agony over some mistake. She smiled, showing the gums above the teeth, and sat with a hand clasp- ing the throat but not successfully covering its rigid structure of bone. "'Do,'" said Ben, looking somewhere else with sudden attention. Ben was

fifteen. Marfa thought: "They think I'm the way I seem. They don't know." But in the midst of a sense of intense guilt she suddenly thought: "Why, I *am* the way I seem. I *told* him he was doing old stuff." For a moment she felt herself pure, dissolved into something shining and fine, mixed with somebody whom she wished to be; then she recalled that she had told that to Marcus in order that she might be a better lure. "But, after all . . ." she thought, and retained the emotion of complacency, an emotion which the guests, by their admiration, slowly lowered. For they told her what an exquisite child she had been, how gentle and precise. At dinner Aunt Phoebe related instances of great beauty and having a double entendre, for not only were these recollections perfumed, but they were edged for a rebuke to her own progeny, and at them Bessie squirmed and Ben attended on the distance. "Had she been so admirable," Marfa wondered, "and what was she now?" But she had told Mr. Bartholomew . . .

Gathered about this table to restore their bodies were eight beings of one blood. But Marfa's blood was replying not to them but to Marcus Bartholomew fifty miles away; and Louis Manchester's blood, as he served the veal, was

flowing toward China; and that of his wife was all in her face, as she looked piteously to his first tasting and not to hers to be sure that the roast was tender; and the blood of Ben and Bessie went pricking in them at those edged tales of Marfa's little girlhood (how good and considerate and truthful *she* had been). And the blood of Aunt Phoebe and Uncle Marshall Ballou looked to lie dry and spent, all save this curious ticking in them as they tried to goad Ben and Bessie to lead the good life. And there was Luna. Luna, amber-colored like Egyptian alabaster, ripe, ready for something, who ate languidly with downcast eyes, lashes black on her amber cheeks, and one hand laid flatly on the cloth. Her blood, rich and dark, flowed evenly for the whole family. Outside, as it happened, there were noble thunder and lovely lightning — the heavens rippling and glaring, the clouds flowing in black and copper, the air whirling in magnificent violence against the walls. It was orchestration for tragedy, for the passion of giants, or for the highest harmonic perceptions of man. But the blood of not one in the room responded or even attended, save that of Mrs. Manchester, who said that she wondered if the south windows were closed, and sent the maid to close them; and that of Luna, who lifted her

eyes to an upper sash and sotto voce used her "Spanish: "*Dio mio*." "I didn't quite catch that," said Uncle Marshall. The thunder drowned Luna's explication. Drowned somewhat, too, Mrs. Manchester's exasperated comment on the dessert: "Not a raisin in it. . . ." Otherwise the conversation was slight, while toward China, toward Marcus, toward the good life, and toward tender veal their red blood pulsed to the volley and flame, the breath and brass of its orchestra.

In the "other room" the tempo subtly changed — the blood flowed not so swiftly, deferring now not so much to the currents of these eight souls as to the offices of digestion. China receded, Marcus paled, the good life dimmed, and the veal was nothing. They spoke little, and Luna, who had the eccentricity of never speaking at all while another spoke, observed that she had had an interesting day. Marfa exclaimed, "Luna — you didn't actually . . ." and thought, "Papa is certainly going. Marcus Bartholomew will do nothing . . ." and fell to wondering again whether he might not make papa's journey an excuse to see her a second time. Long and amber in a chair, her length of limb, very great from thigh to knee, extended in an abandon curiously contrasting with her tense and tortured hands,

Luna replied: "Papa thought I didn't do so badly . . . didn't you, dear?" Louis Manchester looked up from his pamphlet. "She will run the business better than I—before I get back," he explained. "Just exactly what do you expect to find out on this expedition?" Uncle Marshall asked, his head tipped well to one side. "That's what they're going over there to find out," Aunt Phœbe retorted with naked scorn. "Isn't it, Louis?" she nullified her triumph by asking. "He's not going," said Marfa. "When it comes right to the moment, he'll not risk his life and leave us. . . ." She wondered: "Why do I keep on about this? I don't care whether he goes. Is it only to fight with Marcus Bartholomew, to see him again and fight, that I keep on about this?" Ben Ballon shifted his position, legs, arms, head, glance, as if all these were the gears of his voice. "I'd go," he brought out, flushed, and looked with intense preoccupation at a point on the wall. "You would not," said his mother intensely. Bessie murmured, "Mama's joy," and Uncle Marshall conceived his rôle as guest to require him to ask: "Well, what's on for tomorrow?"

There was no pause, marking the instant as momentous, no ceremony of the fatal. As if her

particles spoke for her, Marfa said: "Oh, The Dells. Don't you think so, papa?"

"Might have a picnic nearer home," her father objected.

"Oh, The Dells are nicest," said Marfa. She wondered: "Why do I say that? I don't care where we go."

"How about driving to Madison?" Mrs. Manchester asked. "Then we can stay there for dinner, and there'll be no lunch to put up," she added hopefully.

"I'll put up the lunch," said Marfa. "Don't you say The Dells, Luna?"

Luna, so inert in her chair, was held in a moment of quiet—or perhaps it was an area of quiet, manifesting as space rather than as time. She said nothing.

"Shall it be The Dells?" Marfa insisted to everybody. No one said anything. It would be The Dells. Speaking naturally for the first time, Ben demanded, "What in time's The Dells?" and was rebuked by his father for asking questions. Ben's "Well, but you . . ." dwindled at a metallic glance from his mother. "Pride of the home," his sister Bessie whispered audibly.

"You'll all love The Dells," said Marfa. She added: "I love to be the one to settle things."

She caught Luna's eyes fixed strangely upon her, and wondered: "Why does she look at me like that?"

Bright day and every one in the spell of preparation — nothing seeming as usual; tempo accelerated, haste an emotion, expectation ruling. In Mrs. Manchester the emotion of haste becoming a passion, in Mr. Manchester a futility, in Aunt Phœbe a frenzy, and in Uncle Marshall an unknown functioning. Aunt Phœbe calling "Marshall! Every one else is ready," and he in a kind of sadistic fury slowing down his motions to cause his wife to cry yet again: "Marshall!" And Ben, ready first, honking the horn, and chanting: "I gotta see those dingley Dells." And the two cars filled with mixed Manchesters and Ballons, and Luna at the curb, waving them away. And when had she ever halted so many people just as they were starting off by saying: "It's such a nice day, why don't you go to Madison instead?" And when had Marfa been so indignant with her — now that the plans were all made? And they starting off, with the perfect day before them? She shot back an annoyed glance and saw Luna standing on the steps, her look harried and anguished. . . .

Eighteen miles of July, and you looked into the green as into tourmaline whose planes continued indefinitely. Nothing ended . . . the green was a wilderness of planes, every one leading on far into a space long prepared for it, and not resisting it, and mingling with it in some supreme geometry. Plunging down and outward went the shadows, ghostly horses of something driven at terrific speed, devouring surfaces, zoning the earth. A wash of gray glazed the green, glazed the edges of the leaves, edged the farmhouse walls, the red walls of the barns. It was as if on the edge at which these surfaces met space, some straight slim line resulted which might have been the key to a new direction — as the place at which moonlight and candle-light meet might be the key to a new dimension of light. It was to be seen that hills held static a rhythm of surface, that clouds were dynamics of the immaterial, that the sunlight revealed only the grossest texture of its own raiment, withholding all the rest for the secret of a day to come. And color deserted its palpable rôle on surfaces, and was known not to have been applied, but rather to have been evoked from the vital substance. All this was presented to the vision of Aunt Phœbe and Uncle Marshall, of Ben and Bessie, of Bella

and Louis and Marfa Manchester; but Marfa looked as the others looked — upon the polished or shadowed sides of a world. Only once, a faint light came raying through its crust and smote on Uncle Marshall, and he burst out in a loud voice:

“The foot-hills of time. The foot-hills of time.”

“What’s that, Marsh?” Aunt Phœbe inquired.

Her mate looked dazed and muttered: “It come to me.”

Marfa thought: “He saw something for a minute — like this that I see all the time . . .” but when she looked about her, she still saw only the polished or shadowed externals of the world. She wondered: “What do I see more than he sees?” and did not know. However, she kept her feeling of complacence.

In a green launch gay with awnings they cut the current of the Wisconsin River between shores young with leaves and old with rocks. These Dells, a mood of a river, opened and let in the people but were not intense enough to lay upon the people their mood. Citizens of The Dells village told of the seven hundred thousand pieces of tourist mail that passed through their post-office in a summer, the guide pointed out Napoleon Bonaparte’s profile in the rocks, and Ben

looked at the water and said, "Gee, I'd like a swim," and when told that he'd drown like a shot, gazed sceptically at a point on the horizon before him. Artists' Glen, Cold Water Canyon, Witches' Gulch. Wings of gulls, flash of berries of the mountain-ash, ripple of the paddle of the side-wheeler plying by, rocking of the launch in the big boat's wake, nasal swell of the luncheon-horn at a resort, warm breaths from banks of wintergreen, cool breaths from deeps of stone. Uncle Marshall said that it was a magnificent spectacle; Bessie used her vanity-case, realized that she was inappreciative and squirmed; Marfa watched the pulse and quiver of the water and thought: "He's here much more than they are." The launch nosed the sand, they landed and penetrated clefts and fissures wide enough for foot-passage, the sandstone, save for a blue aisle of sky, meeting overhead; and below the flimsy walks went the wild water of a brook. For ten thousand years, fifty thousand years, it had lain so, long empty of life, filled with the Winnebagoes and the Foxes; then filled with the French, fur-traders, trappers, explorers, settlers; filled now with tourists, villagers, Aunt Phœbe, Uncle Marshall. A magnificent spectacle. Artists' Glen, Cold Water Canyon, Witches' Gulch. Marfa

thought: "Much more than he's in his office, he's here. He must know. . . ." Ben thought: "I'm going to lose 'em and have a swim."

They spread their lunch in the warm alcove of a little grove. Marfa tried to tell them about Black Hawk, but she knew very little. Down at the Narrows projected the point at which the chief had leaped the river before his enemy — they ate tuna sandwiches and heard how he had leaped the river, before his enemy; heard of the adventures of the Winnebagoes and the Foxes with the white men — which, Marfa said, bore all the tone color of "adventures with wild men." But Aunt Phœbe observed stiffly that no white men were wild except in their youth, and that this was dying out. On that she eyed Ben. Ben at once stretched his neck, examining a spot on the opposite shore. Louis Manchester said joyously that he should soon be envying them these green and restful scenes. His wife cried, "Oh, Louis . . ." and in exactly the same tone: "*Didn't* I put in any fruit-knives?" Bessie had dropped her sandwich on her frock and was tense from head to foot, stony, glazed. Withdrawn, with a plate of plenty, Uncle Marshall's bulk propped itself against a sapling while he ate and studied the scene. "A magnificent spectacle," he

said, around an olive. This was the picnic. The silent blaze of noon bathed them; but the sun seemed to come from one plane and the wind from another; and color — green, blue, and color of water — from a third plane; and then there was consciousness issuing from another plane. And all these planes met and passed and intersected, permeating one another, so that the hollow scene of the little alcove in the grove was an airy mass resembling beryl or chrysoprase, made of infinite planes; and every plane might be infinitely extended, to mingle with space and with still stranger manifestations. Especially the consciousness of the picnic party, a consciousness which being one was yet lightly crystallized, so that no consciousness was quite articulate but was held, caught, netted in indefinable substance that shut off one from another, prisoning them as light and color and wind were prisoned and conditioned. And it was so that the Manchesters and the Ballons had moved through The Dells — not once able to flow into and mingle with Artists' Glen and Cold Water Canyon and Witches' Gulch.

After lunch they stretched on the warm grass, save Aunt Phœbe, who strayed about. Marfa lay, eyes closed, body singing in the warmth. She

thought, "This is heaven — a little," and then knew that this singing was not made of the warmth and beauty and ease of that hour, but made of a background of Marcus Bartholomew. She thought: "He is not like the man I want to love." However, nothing within her seemed to hear these words. Uncle Marshall stared at a cotton cloud and said, "When I was a boy I used to want to live in the country," and this sentence seemed to have for him a spell, for he repeated it and stared about, amazed that he was fifty-odd and a wholesale jeweller in town. "The country," he said, "the country." You saw spangled pastures and fall fields. You saw miles of gray empty road and rich apple-trees with ladders. His wife said, "Too many milk-pans," and walked about. Bessie was drying the sandwich filling off her skirt, and Marfa said: "You and Ben look alike." Where was Ben? They wondered idly. He had gone as a star sinks, and no one had noticed.

Mrs. Manchester now had the basket repacked, and Mr. Manchester had dug out a bit of rock which looked pre-Cambrian, he said, and every one asked, "What's that?" and didn't listen. They made a movement to go, generated in the particles, one would say, for no one had proposed going — a kind of explosion of time-to-go after

a smooth flow of merely staying. Where was Ben, though? His father called him—a sonorous “Ben!” In the pause which followed, the little grove moved its leaves innocently, their shadows flowed and formed, and the boughs feathered in the wind as if they were drawn through water. A sewing-machine bird stitched in the stillness. “Oh, Ben!”

Ben. They expected him, hardly looked for him, followed a vague trail among bracken and wild geranium. They expected him, he would disengage his shadow from the oak trunks and move towards them. They crossed a place where the wintergreen was thick, and they thought about wintergreen, moss, a hickory-tree, a boulder. Mrs. Ballon said her feet were giving out. “Where’s Ben?” she inquired irritably. “Oh, Ben!” his father called. Still they looked among the near trees. “Ben!” Now they looked farther away, peered, mistook for him an alien picnicker. “Ben!” Now they looked at one another.

The trail ran down to the water, grass slippery, sandstone teasing the soles. Where was the boy? There was the launch, rocking and dipping at its rotting pier. The steamboat whistled—the *Dell Queen* far down at the Narrows. Now Ben would come running to leap in the launch, and

be rocked in the wake of the big boat. They reached the pier, handed in the baskets, the lolling guide came from under his cap and cut loose. They looked up and down the river, green and glossy in the sun, black and surfaceless under the shore rocks. Nothing was sinister. A wren was singing. "Ben!"

A voice came up-river, hardly more than the voice of a picnicker at play. Another voice, voices, one thin and lifted like a blade. Then a voice slashing out of the clamor in great gouts of tone, the indrawn breath flowing like blood: "Help, help, help."

Ben's voice. From a jut of rock his bobbing head. An arm upthrust, wild, taut, angled. Then the water covered them. . . . Ben's head, Ben's arm, Ben's voice. The launch — put it about — Ballon's heavy body rolling into it, he shouting to the guide, "Quick! God! Quick!" and to the others: "Don't come." The nose of the launch wheeled leisurely — it knew its business, it was a picnic launch, a holiday launch, it wheeled leisurely. The voices, black figures on that lip of white beach, black figures hurling themselves into the water. Then another voice — the guttural of the *Dell Queen*, coming up-river, coming round the green bend. And in its path, for the

second time, that head, that upthrust arm. And then that torn voice choking from Ben's throat.

Two black figures dived. The *Dell Queen* passed, majestic, preoccupied, complacent. Her passengers shouting at the rail were like ants on a sleeping animal. In the wake of slashing foam once more Ben's white face showed not like a face at all. The brown launch was a big boat's length away, the two divers rose and beat about and dived again. The brown launch was there, on the very spot. Foam and bright slapping waves, and gradual quiet. The dream of the diving and the cries ashore went on. These confused shouts came to the Manchesters and the Ballons, huddled on the gay green shore. They moved and rocked their bodies and their arms. But Marfa stood bent forward, staring at the river. She was more calm than the others, saying, when it was all over: "It couldn't happen. Such a thing . . . you see, it isn't possible . . . why, we all came up here together. Wait . . . wait . . . you'll see . . . it couldn't happen. . . ."

A cottage at The Pines chanced to be lying vacant, and the women huddled in there, hearing the shouts of the searchers, hearing the campers who passed the door and said: "They're in there — his folks are." Ballon and Manchester were

down with the men who were beginning to drag the river. Their shouts rose to the cottage, and as the dark fell, their torches and flash-lights trembled on the opposite shore, white on the green, white among the broken rhythms of the leaves. This cottage had two small rooms and a wide fireplace, there were cretonne and reed, and story magazines; it was a small gay place equipped for leisure and happiness, and not for four women, pale, moving little, peering out at the river, and retreating when the campers passed. Of these, several came to the veranda, inquiring, offering; and Marfa saw them and said, "Nothing, thank you, nothing," and heard them tell how it had happened: When a person didn't know the river, when a person didn't realize how deep it was and how cold. . . . And "Is it deep?" Mrs. Ballon asked in a voice without substance. Apparently relieved to have some definite service to give her, some definite information to impart, the campers told how very deep it was: Fifty feet, some had heard, with the water raised from twelve to twenty feet after the dam went in . . . a shame, too, they added, covering up so much river-bank; but some said you could go into places in the rocks where you couldn't go before . . . yes, and the young man dived right in where the

bathers mostly didn't go, but nobody told him. Nobody noticed him. He went into a quiet place account of no bathing-suit. The first *they'd* heard, they were in the pavilion, having a game, was his scream, just after the boat whistled, and they hadn't thought anything of it till he screamed the next time, and then they'd seen his head. They asked questions about Ben, and Marfa answered — since the others were crying; but Mrs. Manchester kept saying: "To think it happened when he was our company. And I almost wrote you not to come, on account of my nervousness. . . ." The kindly campers now told Marfa that it seemed so sad, because these cottages were mostly used by brides and grooms — a couple had just gone out that morning. And now this poor young man — they looked at the long reed couch as if his body were lying there. They went away, saying: If there *was* anything . . .

Marfa went out on the little porch. The Norway pines, very slender, swayed against the late yellow of the west, pale above the black shore. It was a home of whippoorwills and they were calling, their three-toned notes pulsing together, or in a broken synchrony. Below the Narrows the *Dell Queen* whistled and presently passed — its fore-lamps silvering the water, its decks

unlighted and ghostly; and the touching of strings and the laughter of the people not ceasing, since no one knew that the boat was churning over the spot where they were dragging for Ben. Far up the river the Winnebago music began — some Indians, taught to give again their tribal dances for the tourists. Their red fires blazed above the trees where they posed against the rocks, the tom-toms beat, and the strange high voices patted on the air their monotonous exhaustless cry. Marfa heard them, heard the music and laughter of the retreating boat, the shouts of the men resuming their search, the sobs and shaken words of Ben's mother, of Bessie; her own mother's self-accusation, and the whippoorwills. She thought: "Mama's absurd. Doesn't she remember that it was I who insisted on The Dells? Mama wanted to go to Madison so she wouldn't have lunch to put up. It was I who wanted to come to The Dells. It was I who did this to Ben. . . . I killed him, just as I killed Paul. . . ."

Luna sat in the strip of garden. Marfa saw her, long and pale, doing nothing, turning an expressionless face as she heard her sister coming toward her. Luna began to speak: "It isn't as if I'd urged against it. If I'd only spoken, I shouldn't

feel to blame. But I did no more than suggest your going to Madison instead. Something told me Madison, but I didn't urge it. It's I that am to blame as much as you." Marfa sat down in the green right angle made by two garages greenly vined, and said: "A week ago to-morrow they came for their visit. A week ago to-day at this time they were on their way, happy. Yesterday after the funeral, when I was waiting for my taxi, I thought about them, starting off, leaving that house. Then they came here and I was here and I killed Ben. . . ." "Marfa!" "I did. I insisted on The Dells — you know yourself that I did, again and again. I don't know why. I wish I hadn't. . . ." She felt like a little girl, felt pitiful and little. She thought, "Marcus Bartholomew would sympathize with me," and asked: "No one came — no one telephoned to me while we were gone?" Luna said absently and as if, in the glare of the tragedy, no other light, candle, or star could matter, that there had been a call from town, that a number had been left on the back of the pad; and went on dully with her remembrance: "I know when you first said 'Dells' something caught me, said for you not to go. Why didn't I listen? I didn't listen." Marfa said, "Luna, you're just as you were about Paul

Barker . . .” all the time getting up and moving away, thinking about the pad with the number on its back. Luna sat up tensely, raising her body all together, as a dead body is raised, and said sharply:

“There’s something else. Do you remember Mona? Mona Bradley?” Marfa thought. Against a blur of inner forms and surfaces there emerged a sallow skin and scanty hair. “The one I found to do the cleaning . . .” “She said she was going in the country. You persuaded her to come and clean here, and she lost the country job. She was working here when somebody came about the lights, she said, and took her out, and then they were married. Marfa, he’s been sent to the house of correction for something—Mona was here, with her two babies. She said she knew it wasn’t our fault, but she wondered if we’d help her. . . .” Marfa said: “Our fault! I should think not—just because she met the man on the premises.” Luna continued to look at her. “But you urged her to stay and clean—or she’d have been safe in the country. . . .” Marfa called this ridiculous and moved on up the path, and Luna stopped her with: “The babies, though, Marfa—skinny little things. They’re alive—they’re alive! They began to be because of us. . . .”

"That's morbid," said Marfa. "But if Mona'd gone in the country to the Strongs — you can't tell. She might be married to Bud Strong. . . ." Marfa laughed, said she wasn't God, spoke angrily, and then laughed. Luna got to her feet, moved before her in the path, asked: "Marfa, try to remember. When you met Mona and persuaded her to stay and work for us, did you feel all right about doing that? Or did you feel — well, guilty? . . ." Marfa cried impatiently that she didn't remember, that she must telephone, that Luna mustn't be silly; and ran away to the house. At the porch door she looked back. Luna stood still in the path. Luna was looking slightly upward, as if great dim walls were closing her in, as if she stood in a place of twilight while high walls of the darkness, like fog, extended up save in her little area of the clear. The garden flowers showed massed and papery, blue, white, blue. A leaking hose gurgled in the grass. All these seemed fluid and arbitrary, as if a word would dissipate their arrangement and occasion other relationships. All these seemed not fixed and physical, but abstract, mental, so that like acts and occasions, marriage and birth and death, the things of the garden might lose their certainty and flow, the one within another, at a word. Marfa looked,

wondered, and hurried away to the pad with a number on the back.

It was his number. She was to call him, at his office, before six o'clock. And she had reached home in time, but no one had remembered to tell her. Now she must wait until morning to know what he had wanted. She felt irritation at Luna, who had not told her; at the maid in the kitchen, who might have taken the number; and she went to the kitchen, for the pleasure of the only available emotion, and asked Erralee sharply why she was not given her telephone calls, making the plural enhance her grievance. The black maid in the bright kitchen, the clean paint, the enamel, the odor of oilcloth, the grinding of a food-chopper, the ticking of the wooden clock, these gave her the peace of home, of routine, of the familiar, and she smiled.

The smile included a slim beautiful brown girl who was turning the chopper — Marfa looked at her, seeing her beauty, pathos, shyness, hope, despondency, while Erralee poured out halting, forced words — curious words to be tearing through the bright safety of the kitchen: Words about a tragedy which had left this girl, Effie, with no one but Erralee to look to, a girl with the longing to learn, to “make herself sumfin’,” the

woman said over and over. Her voice rose in a chant, rose and beat wildly and awkwardly about the kitchen, among the stereotyped blue dishes and the tinware. In this crystallized, set, and certain air her voice was like a cry from a dark planet, hanging invisibly below the safe earth and sending up its plaint and plea: "Less'n she get away from me, she cain't nevah make herself sumfin'." The girl herself lifted to Marfa eyes of anguish and stood motionless beside the food-chopper, said, "Yes'm, school somewheres"; said: "Yes'm, for to teach my folks." Marfa replied, quite kindly, that she would see what she could think of, received the shock of the black woman's thanks, saw the dumb cry in the face of the brown girl, and left the kitchen. But she was thinking: "This Effie — no. I've had enough of doing things to people's lives. I don't *dare* help her. I don't dare. . . ." The telephone rang and her heart beat; but it was only a neighbor, saying that she had been away and had just heard of their trouble and wondered if there was anything . . . Marfa thought: "She doesn't know I took Ben to The Dells and drowned him." She sat in her room, remembering Ben, weeping. In the midst of a passion of tears she looked again at the memorandum torn from the back of the pad. Perhaps

he had said eight. When she saw that it said six, she wept again.

Early the next morning Mr. Manchester was about, beginning to pack his old black portman-teau, beginning to make a list. His wife told him not to be silly, that even if he went, those old shirts wouldn't do, but he kept on, packing and assembling. Marfa said: "Mother, don't. Don't you see that he's just glad to be doing something that he knows about instead of seeing Ben dead?" "I'd be ashamed," cried Mrs. Manchester, as if it were bad enough for her, as hostess, without being reminded of it. Her parents kept accidentally haunting the two telephones. At last Marfa went boldly to the one in the upper passage and called Bartholomew's number. Her mother said: "Papa may be able to feed the family, but he never can meet your long-distance bills."

Again he was on the wire, as if he had been waiting. And when she heard his voice Marfa also heard her own, quite as impersonally, crying: "I must see you — I must see you!" In her tone was all the tension of her terror as she had looked on Ben, Ben in the water, Ben carried in, Ben in his coffin. She remembered his cravat, as she remembered Paul Barker's cravat; those curiously

living cravats, in the coffins. "Any time . . . anywhere!" she answered Marcus Bartholomew. "I'll drive over to-night," he said, and then, as if he had thought of this before: "I suppose you wouldn't want to come across the bridge to meet me — at about seven?" She said of course, and that one couldn't talk there at home. She cared not at all who heard her, but no one appeared to be noticing her, for her mother, from the stairs, was asking her father if he expected to go to China with two collars.

She passed his door and he called her — "Pussy." She went in, veiling her distaste for the name. Her father turned from the bed where his things lay in little piles, and he held her by both arms. "His effects," she thought. "These look like his effects." He was looking shrunken, harrowed, white. "Marfa," he said, "don't feel so bad about Ben. I know you proposed The Dells, but it might have been the same in Madison." She said: "Don't try to comfort me, father. We both know." His eyes dilated somewhat and he thrust forward his head. "You mean, you still think you killed him?" She nodded — a gesture which might have been an assent to a request to be confirmed about a telephone number. Her father fingered her collar. "I hate to go away and

leave you feeling like this—knowing there's something in it, too. Not as much as you think, but something." She looked puzzled: What did his going or not going have to do with it? "Daughter," he said, "would *you* rather I wouldn't go?" She looked up at him. "Say the word," he said, "and I won't go and leave you, now this has come on you."

She regarded him, lightly frowning. "What would that have to do with it?" she asked.

His arms dropped like weights and he turned away. "I didn't know but it would," he muttered. Something pushed at her uneasily from within. She had been honest, direct, as he would have had her be, yet something pushed and clawed at her, as if she had committed a mortal act. She looked at her father's back as he went on laying out cravats. "I couldn't have you staying at home on my account," she said. "But I wish you would on your own." He said: "I thought you talked before Bartholomew as if you didn't want me to go." She blushed, said only: "I wasn't used to the idea then." He muttered, "No. It's settled. I understand," and went on counting his cravats. She left the room, her mind saying that she had been sensible and direct, but something within her continuing to claw.

She stood in the passage and looked at a torn place in the paper, high up. "Is there something in me that wants to act differently from the way I act?" she wondered. This she dismissed as improbable. She went down the stairs, her hand passing smoothly over the rich soapy smoothness of the walnut handrail. "Then am *I* that, or am I the one that acts so?" she wondered. She stood in the door, looking out into thick green, thick sun, all slow and thick and golden. "Then which one was it that killed Paul and Ben?" she asked aloud.

Her mother's voice called from an inner room. "Raspberries," she was saying, with something more; and again: "Raspberries."

The telephone tinkled, and at her "Yes?" a leisurely voice came: "This is Max Garvin. I have some fine calendulas in bloom — I wondered if I might cut some and bring those books to your father to-morrow night . . . this is Miss Marfa, is it not?" She wondered how he knew that, pictured his lean lounging length at the telephone, saw his garden, his bunch of calendulas already in his hand. There had been only that glimpse of him, when Marcus Bartholomew's car had stopped at the Garvins' door on Sunday morning; since when she had not once thought of him. But now she felt pleasure that he had called, had

recognized her voice. She was aware that Luna came through the passage, paused, wavered, hovered near. Marfa heard herself saying:

"Yes, indeed you may. Or couldn't you get over to-night, Mr. Garvin?"

"Delighted to come to-night," he amended. "I'll motor over toward eight."

She thought: "Why on earth did I say to-night? It was precisely as if something in me spoke for me, and not I at all." She stared about the passage as if it, too, like herself, held another, an unsuspected aspect; but no, the passage presented a single front and kept the faith — rack, rail, and rug. "Still," she thought, "to look at me, one would not suspect that some one else inhabits me — some one who utters unexpected words." Once more she wondered: "Or am I in there, in me, safe enough — but this outside, this skin and bone, speaks up without consulting me. . . ." She was aware of Luna at her elbow, a shadow, saying irritably: "Why did you tell him to come to-night? I'm too tired to dress. I wanted to tell you not to leave it at to-night." Marfa looked critically in her vanity-case, found that outside aspect singularly to her liking, and rouged her cheeks. "The raspberries are getting poor now," she heard her mother going on.

But when Marfa had left the house, had gone through the town, had crossed the bridge, had entered the long tourmaline corridor of the river road and saw Bartholomew's car standing under a locust, the thick crouched figure of Bartholomew himself regarding the river, her mood toward him changed, she was annoyed at his having asked her to meet him there.

"Well?" she said quietly when they met.

"I know," he said, "I've seen the papers. Horrible for that to happen to you — a guest in your house. . . ."

"Even if I hadn't killed him," she put in.

To his incredulity she opposed her explanation, added the story of Paul Barker, offered all this with her curious adult quiet.

He stared at her, and instead of the sympathy for which she was bidding, he said only: "You must understand this. You live no emotional life. You're making up your quota by appropriating these crimes." And this she burst out about in angry denial. He didn't understand, she said many times. "A murderer gets a great kick," he defended, "for a little while. You're after that vicarious kick. No — not vicarious, real. You are pretending reality and stealing the kick, to make up to yourself. Surely you see that?" She cried:

"But it is the truth that matters, whatever I feel! Well, the truth is that I've led both these boys to their deaths." "Once," said Bartholomew, "they would have called that morbid. Now I'm inclined to think it's a signally healthy sign. You poor little starved creature. . . ."

She beat at him with a tumult of words. The river ran glassy and yellow, silken waves and silken light, velvet sand-bar, jewels cresting the water movement. Upon the air the tumult of her words fell with no more effect than upon the slow fabrics of the water, the sand, and the leaves. "That's not morbid, that's healthy," was all that he said.

She cried: "Morbid! That's what Luna is! Luna thinks that I'm to blame for Mona Erralee. I asked Mona Erralee to stay and clean when she was going to the country. She stayed for a half-day and met a man and married him. Now he's gone to the house of correction — there she is, with her two sick children. Luna says all this is my fault, because I asked her to stay and clean for that half-day. It isn't my fault — that's ridiculous."

Bartholomew said cruelly, and without the grace to turn away his eyes: "There's no kick in that. Nothing clean-cut and terrible,

like murder. Nothing but compassion for the mess."

She sat down on the green by the river. He remained staring at the current. She began to cry out brokenly against what he had said. He said no more, let his former words hang in the silence.

"Why did you think I said that I must see you?" she demanded at last.

"For the same reason that I wanted to see you," he answered.

She cried: "I wanted comfort, in this terrible situation in which I find myself."

He protested: "You wanted the emotion of blaming yourself and having me defend you. Well, I do neither. I know what is affecting you. Your life is nothing. Come and make it something with me. . . ."

She cried furiously: "What a way to make love! Do you think I can love anybody who pulls to pieces my motives like that?"

He said: "My dear girl, I've not said much about love. I don't think that the attraction which pulls at us is enough for that. Can't you face things honestly, without the decorations that the rest of the world needs?"

"What do you propose, then?" she asked curiously.

"Europe, I'd say — when the party goes to China."

The sun shone full on him, the square figure, the thick face, the scar on the upper cheek. "What a man," Marfa thought. "He is ugly, uninteresting, stupid, cruel. Why am I here with him?" She rose.

"Let's drive back to the house," she proposed. "All this used to amuse me. Now I'm not amused unless I'm in earnest. Anyway, Mr. Garvin is going to drive over. . . ."

She moved toward his car. He came beside her, his grasp on her arm hurt her.

"We've had no time," he said. "There'll be no time before we go — the expedition. Do you realize that if I go then, when I come back we'll have nothing? It'll all be over — rubbed out by the distance and by time. What we have may not be enough — but what *is* enough? This is more than most. It devils me and it devils you. Marfa, let's gamble with it. Marfa! Ask me not to go to China."

She stared at him. "That's what father said — should he stay behind. He left it to me — you leave it to me. I'm to say the word!" She laughed. "You don't leave it to me, really — you are getting your fun in seeing whether I believe you."

Well, I don't." He said gravely: "On my honor. If you ask me to stay, I'll stay." She looked at him, thought: "I like this man better when I'm not with him." She got into his car. "No," she said, "I'll give you no excuse to stay at home. They always want to back out, on the brink of expeditions!" "The expedition," said he, "be on your head."

As they came to the veranda Mrs. Manchester announced querulously, "Erralee has been asking for you, Marfa. Every five minutes. Would you mind seeing what she wants?" — and began to tell Mr. Bartholomew about her kitchen troubles, her garden troubles, her digestive tract. Marfa went through to the kitchen and found Erralee with the brown girl Effie. "Oh, Miss Marfa," Erralee began, her eyes, her head, her lips rolling, "Effie, she got to give her word to-night for a good job cooking. Effie, she say she go ef'n she don't go to school. Miss Marfa, I got fif' dollars she can have for school, but she say it won't send her. I don't see how come fif' dollars won't send her. Miss Marfa, ef'n you help her out, I'll work it out with your ma." Marfa stood staring at Effie, the beautiful brown creature, her face rich in shadow, lustrous in light, her eyes like Spanish eyes, her figure, her grace, her startled look all

exquisite. That girl, set at large in the city, limited only by the only school open to her . . . "I cannot risk it, Erralee," said Marfa with decision. "I cannot decide her life for her like that." "You *are* decidin' it, Miss Marfa, ef'n you don't help her to go," said Erralee low. "That is absurd," said Marfa sharply. "I'm sorry — you both know that. But I can do nothing to interfere in the course of Effie's life." "Yes'm," said Effie, and slipped from the door into the other shadow. Erralee left the room, muttering; her muttering, the other's silence and vanishment, the abrupt sharp silence of the kitchen, smote on Marfa like powerful positives. She thought, "What have I done?" — remembered how often she had thought that, felt the strong urge to return to the veranda. "This is nothing," she said aloud. "Nothing at all."

On the veranda her father and Mr. Bartholomew, with bright eyes, were discussing the transportation of light luggage in the interior of China. Marfa said a preoccupied good night and left them. Marcus Bartholomew called after her: "You would better ask us to stay at home, Miss Marfa."

As she crossed the hall some one came running up the steps. A messenger, a telegram for Mr.

Manchester. At once, and before he had opened the envelope, Manchester cried out: "It's Garvin!" And it was Garvin; or it was a messenger from the hospital where Garvin lay. Garvin's car had collided with a truck a short distance from the Manchester's house.

Marfa lay in the darkness. Not only Paul Barker and Ben, she thought; but now Mr. Garvin, with his legs broken and an injury to his spine. Two men dead, one man crippled, because of her quite careless suggestions. Suppose Mr. Manchester was right and that Mona Erralee's wretched life and the existence of her miserable children were likewise traceable to light words of her own. "Can you stay and clean this morning, Mona?" . . . and there hung Mona's miserable life and there stood the two blue-lipped children alive, alive — with blue-lipped progeny of their own to follow. What did one make of a world like that, wherein a chance word bred death, misery, existence, futures?

Now she saw a room done in green, with books on the walls. She was there, at nineteen, and Lina Burrell. The fire was low, an ash, breathing flame. "Stir the fire, Lina," she had begged. She remembered the languorous movement, the snap and

glitter, the cry, the recoil of Lina's body. Long weeks for Lina in a darkened room, who then emerged and lived her years, the left eye smooth and sightless — because of the spark that had flashed from the gray ash and had cut the pupil, left gray and ashen too. "Stir the fire, Lina . . . stir the fire, Lina." Over the fire in that fireplace spread an Adirondack lake, oily and sullen. And while the house-party weighed going out in the yacht, she — Marfa — had cried a gay affirmative and they had yielded. At four that afternoon, when they had made the pier, storm-beaten and terrified, it was with the news that the cook, a fine Swedish lad, had been washed overboard. . . . Grave or gay, accusing or withdrawn, other lads came by her eyelids — and of them she would not think — boys who had loved her and whom she had pierced through their open hands. Yet a refusal that she did not wholly mean, a promise that she had not kept, a love that had cooled, were these mortal sins? And why then had lives torn or thwarted led so straitly from her lips? . . . There was a neighbor's child who carried on his cheek the mark of the fangs of a wolfhound, because she had taken the baby into her car one day. . . .

All these evils were of her creation. And she had meant to be so right.

"Paul, let's go to see Stella." "Oh, let's decide on The Dells." "Stay and clean this morning, Mona." "Stir the fire, Lina." "A sail—let's go for a sail!" "Do you want to go with me in the car, darling?" and "Oh, Mr. Garvin, bring the calendulas to-night!" But these were not sins. These were motions of routine. These were nothing.

Early next morning she went to the hospital. Max Garvin was in the operating-room. She sat for an hour waiting for news of him, and went away with the word that it might be a matter of months before he would walk again.

"You see," she explained to her family tersely at lunch, "he wanted to come here to-night. It was I who changed his plans. I am responsible for what's happened. . . ."

Luna leaned forward, her hands tense on the cloth. "You don't know," she said wanly. "I came through the passage—I heard what you said to him. Something told me not to let you leave it at last night, but I disobeyed. I said nothing. It is I who am to blame."

"Luna, how idiotic!" Marfa cried hotly.

"It was I—you must see that it was I," Luna insisted.

"How can you be so stupid. . . ."

"It was most certainly I. . . ."

Mr. Manchester interposed. "Anybody," he said, "would think you girls got something out of having smashed Garvin's legs."

They exclaimed against their father with indignation, and reverted to the dull round of their lives; to their mother saying that she knew the raspberries wouldn't be good so late, and they weren't.

When she was first admitted to see Garvin, Marfa spread a mass of lemon lilies on his bed, and told him tensely that it was she who had done all this to him. "Nonsense," he said; "trucks are everywhere. I picked out that one — that's all. I hoped you'd come to see me."

She regarded him. This was not Garvin of his own door-step, as she had seen him between rhododendrons and the cut-leaf birch. Here was a being robbed of his mask, of his "side," his tension; here was one lax, without defenses, idle, absent, drained of some of his power to be an *I*.

She sat down by his bed and looked at him, across the lemon lilies. The bluish unshaven face, the eyes drawn deeper by shadow, the faintly ironic mouth — Garvin. She had hardly heard his name until the day, less than a week ago, when

she had met him. She had seen him briefly, had thought of him not at all, had heard his voice over the telephone, had settled his fate. Garvin. There he was. Alive, sentient, breathing; and, by her, bound. She felt stupefaction; she heard him saying: "The way you press your hands together and keep looking about the room — are you in pain because you think I'm in pain? I'm not, you know. I'm stiff, but normal." She said dully: "If I had let you bring the calendulas to-night instead of last night . . ." He laughed. "Oh, for that matter, if the calendulas hadn't bloomed so early this year! You and God and the sun and the rain. . . . And then, of course, if the truck hadn't been so late in getting home. He'd broken down, I believe, and then started up and came round the corner smartly in a hurry for his dinner. If the truck manufacturer had done a better job — well, you see!" "But," she said, "I see that all that would have mattered nothing, save for my proposal changing yours. . . ." He frowned: "Don't be absurd. Everybody does these things. It's nothing that one can help . . . all at once." By those words she was abruptly caught, and she turned to him swiftly, as if he had spouted up some giant fountain of fire. "All at once?" she asked. "What does that mean?"

"It means that you are not to blame yourself in the least," he said gently. "Talk to me about your flowers." But she had no idea of talking about flowers. She began: "All night I've thought of the shocking things that I've done to people. Why, there was a boy whom I urged to go to Chicago, gave him letters, dozens of them, arranged a place for him to stay with some friends of mine. He got into work, got into trouble, went insane — I tell you, insane. Well, who did that to him?" "You mustn't be morbid," said Garvin; "you're far too pretty." Marfa hardly heard him. "They came to me all night, processions of catastrophes that I've brought down on people." Her voice dropped and she closed her eyes: "Do you know that I once tried to get a prisoner paroled — a man who had served in a state's prison an endless term, for something that now would have meant for him only a few years' sentence. He was on the point of his parole — and I sent a petition signed by some people here, and one of the signers was an enemy of the parole officer. He denied my prisoner's parole — that was six years ago, and for those six years he has me to thank. . . ." "I say," said Garvin, "you *have* got a list. Yours is worse than mine." Marfa regarded him and cried: "Yours! Have you some people like

that, too?" "Well, hasn't everybody?" Garvin demanded. "What else is it that gnaws at us all when we wake at three in the morning — what else but regret for the people whom we have made miserable?" "But not everybody!" she cried hopefully. "Everybody save the saints, I'd say. There's no one who hasn't made somebody miserable at some time, voluntarily or involuntarily, consciously or unconsciously. I remember . . ."

"Tell me!" Marfa cried out, as he paused and looked doubtfully at the lemon lilies. "Well, my mother," he owned. "I was coming home from Chicago on the night before Thanksgiving — coming home for dinner. But the train was late, and I ate dinner on the train. When I got home, there was the turkey and all the rest — she'd prepared the dinner herself and they'd waited. I tried to eat, but she knew. She spoke sharply in her disappointment, and I answered stupidly. I was due to leave next day — and I never saw her again. I expect it's asinine, but that incident has power to torture me. . . ." "Oh," cried Marfa, "but deaths and insanity and prison . . ." She stopped short of cripples. "It'll take you a long time," he seemed to concede. "But what does that mean?" she pressed. "I mean to do my best — I mean to be

right! It isn't as if I were willing to do injuries to people, or wrong them at all. I'm not! And yet these hideous things happen just when I'm doing my best." He was silent and she repeated: "What do you mean — about it taking me a long time? And that I can't do it all at once?" He closed his eyes. "Would you read to me a bit?" he asked. "And send the lemon lilies to be put in water?"

She sat reading to him, her lips running over an Italian translation, her mind on her own case. She was a murderer and a monster, a destroyer. . . .

Some flowers, some clouds, some words
Are masculine and pierce the world,
Begetting poison, tornado and misery,
Peopling the green, the town, and the event
With sorrow;
Peopling the people with seeds of death.
Some flowers, some clouds, some words
Quicken and nourish life
Like a woman.
Destroyer, conserver, let me learn
The uses of man and woman words,
Flowers, clouds, policies, relationships,
And their correspondences. . . .

Marfa looked over the book. "I am the de-

stroyer," she said. "If I were any of these things, I should be destroying everything that I touch." He looked at her squarely: "Don't disregard this," he begged. "That you have also a genius for giving life. You look like a life-giver." "You don't deny the rest," she cried, "that I'm a destroyer — one of the human race who prey on the rest, when they mean to help them?" He replied gravely: "I don't deny that you are one of those whose good motives seem sometimes to breed evil — no, I don't deny that." "But how do you explain it?" she cried. "Don't take it too seriously . . ." he began, but she cried out and rose with a gesture of passion. "It's a curse," she said; "I know that now, since I've talked with you. . . ." "It is not," he said sharply. "How absurd of you — how mediæval. No, indeed. It's a most interesting example of something else." His blue eyes burned up from his pillow. "Come back and let's talk about it. . . ." "It's a curse," she said, "and I mean to run it down!" His weak amused laughter followed her as she left his ward.

On the day on which Mr. Manchester and Mr. Bartholomew left Old Town to join the main body of the expedition, Garvin had his report from the surgeons: the spinal cord severed,

paralysis from the waist down. So his life lay before him.

They told Marfa in the waiting-room. She drove her car out to the country, went into a field lying against the sky, trampled the barley in a zigzag path to the crest of the slope. Standing there facing the afternoon, she saw only darkness, and herself against the darkness. She was not thinking of herself now, only of Garvin and his life that lay before him. Her anguish was greater than any that she had suffered. Paul Barker and Ben and the cook, they were at least safely dead; but Garvin had years of suffering to pay for her quite involuntary words. As Lina had her semi-blindness, as the child wore the scar, as Mona had her misery. So she came back to herself again.

"God, God, what's the matter with me?" she demanded. "Why do I bring suffering to everybody I touch?"

Her own words came back. "It's a curse. I'm some terrible creature living again. I'm a Borgia. . . ."

She lay at the bottom of life as she had known it. Everything had fallen from her. Her father and Bartholomew had gone, her mother and Luna were remote from her; every one else, she told herself, she had killed or brought to wreckage.

She had no longer even herself, her lovely, commanding, confident self. She had nothing.

When she went into the house, her mother and Luna spoke to her and she did not answer. When her mother told her that Cousin Malvina Beach had written, wanting her or Luna to come to stay with her, that Luna could not go "on account of the store," and that she would better go, as Cousin Malvina was so rich, Marfa did not answer. For some days she lay on her bed, and spoke with utter gentleness, smiling weakly when her mother whispered to Luna that Marfa must be going to die, she was so good.

She had a sense of waiting, but nothing happened. No bolt, no light, no word, no shadow. Eventually she got up, went to see Garvin, said little, pierced him by the grief in her eyes, the absence of life in her voice. She seemed drained of all but the habit of motion. He was cheerful, casual, but he dared not comfort her now. At last they sat silent, on the brink of their two abysses.

"I am going to my cousin's for a time," she brought out stiffly, then burst into passionate weeping, went weeping into the corridor. She met Garvin's nurse, who said:

"Now, now, miss — *you* couldn't help his auto accident."

THERE spread a wash of clear blue over sky, of green over earth, of August morning sun over green and blue.

The lawn of Cousin Malvina Beach's home sloped to its little lake. Marfa, dutifully making talk, said that this was heaven, and after Mrs. Beach's inconclusive deprecation, Marfa added that at any rate it was quite heavenly not to be told of the neighbors, the servants, and the operations, or whatever kept the place from being perfect. Mrs. Beach countered that it was admirable of her not to wish to be told, and Marfa explained, "No one wants to be told. But most people want to tell," and thought that only by her replies could one be sure that Cousin Malvina heard anything that one said. Her look was withdrawn and calm, her look was ordered.

Marfa had arrived the evening before, in a summer tempest that beat at the trees and walls, as if some free flight resented any thwarting. From turmoil of water and wind, Marfa escaped into the calm of the house, and was met by the

calm of Mrs. Beach! This woman, Cousin Malvina Beach, who had been living abroad since Marfa` was a little girl, seemed to be intensely aware of herself, of every person, every object, everything said, so that nothing any longer required her attention. She herself was like her lungs that breathed, like her feet that walked, without any one's regard. For every possible moment she seemed practised. Marfa thought: "She isn't human. What is human? Is it turmoil, confusion, desperation?"

They had dined alone together in a room whose one wall was set with wide glass doors, open to the lake. This was northern country and, the storm having passed, at eight o'clock light was still drenching the sky. A blue sail bent to the white water. The food was unwonted and delicious. "Her cook is more human than she," Marfa thought, and her thought ran on: "But her cook must be ordered and unconfused to make food like this. . . ."

Mrs. Beach then said:

"I thought that Lawrence and Maud would be here before you. They're detained until tomorrow."

Some voice within Marfa cried out: "It's nobody whom I need see? — I beg your pardon . . ."

and again and swiftly: "Oh, it's nobody whom I need see!"

"You know him," Mrs. Beach assured her, undisturbed. "Lawrence Brand. He told me that he used to be in love with you, at college."

"I remember. He took me to my first freshman party. But I can't see him — I can't see any one."

"Charming things," Cousin Malvina went on "At least he is. I picked them up at Biarritz. Lawrence is perfect. The sister has been an invalid for years. I'm afraid he, poor dear, has a quite fearful time with her."

Marfa leaned forward, looking tense and terrible, looking almost old. "I cannot see any one," she said; "I wrote in my letter that I cannot see any one. . . ."

"Your mother wrote something of the boy's drowning," her cousin said, "and that you blame yourself — of course that is natural. Of course it is. But that had nothing to do with these two friends, or with me." She touched at a point between her eyebrows, as if she were sealing it over.

Marfa relaxed, felt ridiculous, thought: "I cannot tell her that I bring disaster to every one I touch — that probably she herself will not be

free of it . . .” and thought: “ I’ll go. I can go in two days.”

Now, waiting on the terrace for the car to come back from the station, she was wretched, sat silent. She thought: “ I’m like a plague-sufferer — I’m like a leper — only I look innocent.” They had told her not to be morbid, her mother and Luna. But who was called morbid who knew in himself the marks of the plague . . . She moved away from Cousin Malvina. She thought: “ Perhaps I’m dead — only my body walks on, moves, poisons everybody, brings death. . . . Perhaps I never have been alive — they might have forgotten to give me the spark, as one forgot to put the eggs in a cake . . . then it’s a dead cake. . . .”

“ We’ll have bouillon and biscuits out here as soon as they come,” Cousin Malvina was obliviously saying. She was a woman, with wrists, veins, breath hollow cheeks, slender body, all so calm. All that she had locked up in her appeared to be nothing. She paid no attention to all that, appeared to have forgotten that she carried in the long white box of her the power to love, hate, sin, regret, to make others suffer. These powers she no longer attended. Or perhaps these had gone. Perhaps her fifty years were enough to leave her, too,

like a cake with no eggs — but yet Cousin Malvina didn't kill or maim anybody. She lived decently, sewed prettily, served bouillon and biscuits on the terrace.

Marfa abruptly turned from her, looked down over the lake where white clouds had been stirred into blue and white water. Beyond, the shores rose, yellow with stubble, green with alfalfa, fluttering with corn. All were honest, simple; serene about being isolated. All were guiltless. Nothing over there had cost any living things its life, its sight, its power to walk, its freedom. . . . The sky innocent, the lake innocent, the field beneficent. "Man is the malady of earth," she thought, and paused. Whose was the voice which of late occasionally spoke up in her like that, saying things of which she never had thought? She watched a robin pulling at an absurdly flexible worm. "He and I," she thought, "we prey. But it's his nature." She stared down at it. "Maybe it's mine. Maybe I'm not even human — not even a malady. . . ."

"It's so warm this morning, I almost wish I'd planned to serve iced drinks," Cousin Malvina said.

Her beautiful car rolled smoothly to the door, and she hurried round to meet the three who

alighted. Her exclamation of surprise was evidently to celebrate the arrival of Anthony Beach, her husband, whose return she had not expected. He came quickly along the terrace, met her with an ardent air of taking account of her, body and spirit. Of him Cousin Malvina took account by her surprise, by her arched brows, by her question, but a question quickly passed over in favor of the two who walked with him. But Anthony Beach, with his bright-eyed and touching confidence, believed himself to be still a part of this ceremony.

"Maud, darling," said Mrs. Beach, "*Lawrence*, dear," and such things. She kissed them both, brought out her murmurs as if they had been waiting, dressed and ready in some background, and turned to Marfa, who now, detaching her gaze from the corn, the alfalfa, and the stubble, gave the three her scrutiny, as light and fixed as a bird's, and as swiftly thrust away.

The sister Marfa hardly saw, Maud Brand — not only on account of her sex but because this young woman had instantly seated herself in a deck-chair and closed her eyes. This woman was young and ill, looked old because of her pallor, because of her frown. She was plain, and there

was in her dressing a despair which showed that she was aware of her plainness.

"In a moment," went Lawrence Brand's voice, with a curious effect of three words flying and alighting from him. He attended his sister with an air of routine, more frightful than any boredom.

"Marfa Manchester!" he now said.

She had no impression of anything save of light and of quiet. It was true that he spoke, looked, moved like another. But there came from him an air of unconquerable quietude; and it was as if human restlessness being gone, a soft flow of light filled the vacuum and rose and out-rayed from him. And this Marfa caught briefly, like a signal. In another moment she was aware only of his physical presence, his fineness, his inattention, his gruffness. There were chairs, luggage, confusion, bouillon, and biscuits. After her greeting, Marfa said nothing.

But there they were, and she saw them, clearly as she was not meant to see them. Anthony Beach, sending to his wife pleased glances to which his wife was unopposed. Lawrence Brand, mechanically serving his sister, who was herself luxuriously aware, who was uneasy until she could get back some central position from which the ar-

rival, the hostess, the confusion had shaken her. No bouillon? Then a drink of water? A fan? A sunshade? To lie down? To be quiet? Oh, no, no, she cried. No, none of this seemed for Maud Brand the expression that she wanted. Not until Lawrence said crisply, "Are you in pain?" did she rise to irritability, cry that nothing, nothing was the matter, and then at last appear content.

Good, kind Anthony Beach, sipping his bouillon, now felt that something was due to Marfa, of whom, it appeared, he had heard recent news. Her father had gone to China! How could she let him go? Her little cousin Ben had been drowned? Now how in the world could that have happened? Vina had said something of a delay in her visit because of a friend in the hospital, whom he trusted was now quite all right once more? The kind fellow talked, perpetually touching at his clipped mustache, which was nowhere near the bouillon at any time. His wife hung over Maud Brand.

A few minutes and all was over, they had gone to their rooms, and Marfa, with her untasted cup, was left staring at stubble, corn, and alfalfa. She thought:

"Was he, then, in love with me at school? Perhaps he could have saved me — saved Ben and

Mr. Garvin and Mona. Saved Marcus Bartholomew and father. . . ." She reminded herself with impatience that Marcus Bartholomew and her father at least were quite all right.

"I must not even speak to him when it can be avoided," she thought, "or I shall do him some harm, too."

Bartholomew's amused eyes came before her: "You feel that way instead of feeling other emotions," he had told her.

She ran up to her room to get into her riding things, and wept as she changed. She wondered if there were people already in the world inevitably approaching for a meeting with her, whom she would injure. Perhaps people unborn. Arrested, she stood imagining that long procession, coming from distance, and she, meaning to be so right toward them all and yet dealing out death and disorder because her body was not an instrument that her willing spirit could use; not tuned, not — what was it that Max Garvin had said? — not polarized. Her body acted without her, uttered the wrong word independently of her intention. As a primitive woman dealt disaster by design, so she, desiring the good, did the evil through the physical ineptitude of her machine. But those others — all pacing toward her . . . She watched

that imagined procession advance, with Lawrence at its head. . . .

When she came down in her tan togs, Lawrence Brand was alone on the terrace.

"I say," he cried when he saw her, "is there another mount, Miss Manchester? Do you mind if I go too?"

It was twelve miles to the village. The road lay shaded and murmurous. The intense awareness and response of the bays manifested in the broken rhythm of their great glossy bodies.

Marfa thought: "I mustn't talk to him. If I don't talk to him, I can't harm him." So when he said, "It's great to be back on a country road in America," she did not reply. When he praised the country, the day, the mounts, she murmured assent, volunteered nothing. He talked on for a bit about the changes that he found, all for the better; about the horse that he had last ridden, at Passy; about the village, where he must make a purchase. Marfa continued her silence. About the college friends for whom he inquired, she manifestly knew nothing. He glanced over at her, she kept her profile turned to his scrutiny. He gave his attention to his horse and said no more.

But now a procession of charming events

began to occur. They met a little gig, its old gray driven by a tiny boy, whose face was bright, taut, alert, like the face of a wood animal. Without her will, Marfa had glanced at her companion and they had smiled. From the deep of the wood through which they rode, a thrush called, one miraculous rebirth of his spring ecstasy. Together they reined in their horses, and sat silent, hoping for an iteration of the call. A tanager burned before them on a bough, and together they saw it. A wandering German band came by, signalled to them, and began to play, so softly that the horses, when they were halted, merely kept time to the music. "*Glück auf für die beide,*" said the fat leader solemnly over his tip, as if he were pronouncing them man and wife.

In the village they made purchases, and stopped at a stall for cold drinks. And through all this Marfa spoke only when the necessity was pressing; and though he had fallen as silent as she, yet they turned their horses' heads homeward in a certain fellowship, as if the spell of silence had more power than the ways of speech.

From the summit of the six-mile hill the road ran like a river between green shores. On the way down the slope Marfa looked over the face of the fields. The meadows lay bathed in the eagerness

with which they had come pressing from below, green stretches of countless seeds in resurrection, poised on pale roots now rummaging beneath them. She had an abrupt sense of the million tiny shoots, spurting upward, crowded, aspiring, individual. And these in turn lay molding and lifting to the year their cups of seed, and all the cool green bodies were already hosts to larvæ and eggs, to life sleeping or already awake and chanting. For no more than a breath, burning and gone again, she felt the life of the fields not as green space but as green multitude, felt its life in her, all seed and no root. With a flash of the sense of the first sea-thing moving from its rock, she saw at the bottom of the hill the empty road leading, gave her horse his head, and when he broke into a gallop, urged him on.

In an instant Lawrence was beside her. They galloped abreast to the long undulations of rock and of sward in the dazzle of noon.

When they reined in, on the low bridge spanning a sleepy stream, Marfa's eyes were bright. She cried: "Wasn't it glorious!" And now Lawrence Brand, looking intently at her, asked abruptly:

"Will you tell me why you've refused all the morning to talk to me?"

She said: "There's a bridle-path along this stream for a mile. I think we've time to follow it, before lunch."

Her heart beating painfully, she thought: "I should never have done that — I should never have turned into the bridle-path. But I'm sure to do something like that again. I've got to tell him the truth about me."

The path edged the stream through a copse of locusts and willows, laced with wild grape. He followed her, in her light immobility, as she met the motion of her horse. When at the end of the path she halted, turned, and looked at him at last, he spoke before she did: "When another woman keeps as still as you do, she's a vacuum. But you — you're something positive all the time." She heard herself say, "You're something positive whether you talk or not," and he cried: "But why shouldn't we talk? It's not necessary, but it's mighty nice. Or it used to be, with you."

He heard: "You don't understand about me, and I've got to tell you."

At this he looked disturbed, as if he had no idea indeed what he might be in for.

"Please, please!" he said rather wildly, "nothing matters, you know. . . ."

Once she would have enjoyed the sensation

that she was making. Now she was in deep distress.

"I bring disaster to every one who comes near me," she said. "I don't want to harm you — I want to warn you away."

At this he stared frankly and then laughed, drawing down his brows.

"Die Lorelei," he said dryly.

She flushed. "Oh, not that," she cried; "nothing like that. And yet death, too — or destruction — blindness — misery." She poured it all out to him: Paul Barker, Ben, Lina, Mona, the yacht's cook, Garvin. A small blue vein stood out in her forehead, as if it were the forehead of a woman old or ill.

He listened, as if he were thinking of her rather than of her words. "What a lot of rotten go's," he said only. "No wonder they've made you morbid."

"It's not morbid," she cried violently, "it's the truth! "

"But we all make one another suffer."

"Not like that! "

"Well, in worse ways."

"Have you ever made anybody suffer? " The bright points of light in her eyes pierced him.

"No end of people."

But when she begged him to tell her how he had done that, he was able to recall only trifling instances of having occasioned discomfort to this one or that. "You see!" she cried triumphantly.

"Look here," he said, "if you think I'm going to keep away from you for fear of that kind of thing, you're jolly well wrong."

Instead of replying, she said abruptly: "You've suffered yourself. Perhaps you're one of those whom somebody else makes suffer."

"No, no," he said roughly, "that's absurd." And his horse, either from a thrust of his or from a sense of crisis, wheeled. She pressed forward to follow. They went on once more in silence. She thought: "I've hurt him by saying that — as if he knew it was true."

When they reached the road, his face was untroubled. "You'll let me take the risk," he begged her, "now that I know the worst?"

"You don't believe me," she said; "I can't make you believe me."

"At any rate, you've warned me."

"That doesn't lessen my responsibility. Every moment I've expected your horse to bolt and throw you over his head."

"Just because I was with you! I say, you poor child!"

At this she frowned, urged on her horse. He followed in silence. At the door he stood beside her as she dismounted. She looked up in his face, saw its adult mask set over the anxious lost look of youth. The imponderable breathed from him, something strong and fierce enough to make itself felt, yet pulsing as delicately as light. And this other influence was so magical that she could hardly bother with his strength.

"So now you know," she bluntly, "why I'm rude to you."

He laughed charmingly, looking at her, but with no comment.

Marfa came down to lunch with a sense of release, as if, after a night of anxiety, she had waked to hear homely accustomed sounds. The others were already at table. As they entered, Maud Brand turned on her brother a look without rancor, without reproach even — merely a fixed unwinking regard following him across the room, continuing after he had taken his place opposite her. Finally he met her eyes, and it was impossible not to divine that from the moment of his entrance he had been aware of her look. His "How are you feeling?" carried no conviction of the casual, but rather a resumption

of a burden which had been for a little while laid down.

Her look did not change. "What shall I say to that?" she asked. Her enunciation was very clear, almost impertinently clear.

"I hoped you'd say 'Immensely better,' " said Lawrence pleasantly.

"No," she said only — a curious "no," slow, short, of rising inflection; a "no" which made her mouth not round but almost closed.

"You look better already," said Lawrence obliviously, but his oblivion carried no conviction either.

Maud Brand smiled — she had a smile, not sweet or kindly, but crooked and mysterious and lingering. "If only I *had* looked better as many times as you've said that," she observed.

He smiled across at her, a smile evidently having no back thought. But she continued to regard him, without eating, and now without speaking — merely that slow-winking, intent stare.

Marfa looked at her, at the long fragile hands, the tips of the long fragile fingers just touching the table's edge, all but a finger of each hand lifted, like butterflies. About the hands there was something eager, terribly expectant, at queer odds with the expressionless watching face, the

face that seemed to expect nothing. The face, pallid and fragile too, shadowed, thinly veined, blue-lipped, was lighted by eyes having the brightness of invalidism; the brightness, Marfa thought, of death. But the thin crooked mouth, mobile, sardonic, dominated the insensate face.

She went on with something that she had been relating:

"The mine had been salted, they said — but he didn't know that. He would never admit it while he lived — said the vein had pinched out — oh, he trusted everybody. Then when he knew that all his friends had lost money through him, he turned that land, for which he had paid thousands an acre, into grazing-land. He bought sheep — the wrong kind at first — and the sheds were insufficient. It turned cold and the sheep crowded into the sheds and smothered to death trying to keep warm. But he wouldn't give up, because of his friends' money — so then he bought more sheep and kept on and on. And he got back all their money for his friends."

"And was it some one you know?" Anthony Beach asked, attending to his mustache.

"It was my father," she said, and looked at them all, with something like maternal pride, as if she had been relating the achievement of a

loved son. "My mother was like that, too," she added.

"But not, alas, her brother," said Lawrence Brand.

She turned on him a look in which pride and rancor were blended. "I have a wonderful, wonderful family," she said, and burst into laughter.

"My father had power," said Lawrence, "that he didn't pass on. He could charm things to come his way."

"And how could he do that?" inquired Anthony Beach, in his slim staccato, and touched with his napkin at his red lips. He had a wandering eye, as if he had been cut from the general mass and never specialized to any form of attention. He asked "How could he do that?" as he might have asked "Did he fish with a fly?"

Marfa cried: "I think your wife knows. Things fall into order where *she* is. Of themselves, you know."

"Yes," said Beach sadly, "she orders even me. I do as I should, in spite of myself."

Maud Brand, who manifestly never attended to any part of a conversation save to that which she herself intended to say next, went on, as if she had not been interrupted:

"My father *drew* things to himself — the kind of thing he wanted. He had a nose for success. People do. They talk of a journalist having a 'nose for news,' and a man having a collector's instinct — and hunter's luck. Well, don't such people somehow get magnetized to attract the things that come to them? It was that way with him. He was magnetized to success — in the long run."

"In the long run," Lawrence repeated. "But he couldn't seem to make his magnet work until he'd first attracted a lot of rubbish that he didn't want."

"And are you a magnet?" Mrs. Beach asked him.

"Didn't I draw you to our table at Biarritz?"

"It was I who did that," said Maud Brand. "It was the only time that I ever attracted anything good. You know, I'm really magnetized to attract ill luck."

"Darling, how ridiculous!" Mrs. Beach cried.

Again Miss Brand took that poised attitude, her hands alighting on the table's edge as if they had just flown there.

"I attracted to myself all my maladies," she said, in a loud and excited voice. "My accident — bad luck on journeys — ptomaine in my food

— friends who have disappointed me — and the most ghastly boarding-places! ”

When they laughed, she cried quite earnestly: “ I’m not joking! I’ve watched this for years.”

“ And look at the brother she magnetized to herself,” said Lawrence.

“ That’s the most extraordinary conception I ever heard in my life,” Anthony Beach said rapidly. “ Isn’t it the most extraordinary conception you ever heard in your life, Vina? ”

Mrs. Beach turned her ordered and placid gaze upon her husband and her guests.

“ She’s a creative genius — Maud,” she observed. “ She doesn’t paint or play, so she invents deliciously.”

Into Miss Brand’s pallid face had come a flow of color, into her eyes bright points of light.

“ Let me ask you,” she said, “ if these things are invented. We went to Rouen — I had three pension addresses. I chose the one in the middle of my list — in the middle. For no reason. Well, they showed me to a room where a woman had died of a fever. I had an illness of weeks — a convalescence of months. In Clovelly I went to walk. I started down one street, changed, and chose another — tripped on the stones and sprained my ankle — I was for three weeks laid up in Clovelly.

In Rome we were given a drunken driver — hundreds of cars out and we alone had a drunken driver. We collided with a railing — my back was terribly wrenched — more weeks in Rome, convalescing, you see. I have reached out-of-the-way hotels when the last room had been given to the tourists one minute ahead of us — one minute! I have taken boats that had a terrible passage, when the next week's sailing was calm and I might quite as well have waited. I have made friends who have annoyed me frightfully when I might have made friends at the same hotel who were angels. . . .”

“Good heavens,” said Anthony Beach, “but who hasn’t?”

“I’ve done all these things, with her,” said Lawrence. “Why wasn’t it I who attracted these things to her?”

“Because when you go alone you have perfectly beautiful times,” his sister said with an air of triumph. “You always do.” Again she regarded him with that mixture of approval and distaste.

“Good Lord,” cried Anthony Beach, “but there’s such a thing as ill luck. . . .”

“Only to those who attract it,” said Maud Brand. “And I do. Look here,” she said suddenly,

"your wife doesn't, does she? Don't things always come out right for Vina?"

With one finger Mr. Beach pressed his minute mustache each way from his red lips.

"She is incorrigible," he said. "I've never known it to rain when she didn't want it to. Oh, literally! Her trains, her appointments, people she wants to see or doesn't want to see — the stars in their courses fight for things to come out right for Vina. I've often said so."

Lawrence laughed. "Good fun," he said to Mrs. Beach, "when you and Maud get together. And what about the rest of us, between you?"

Marfa sat motionless, her food untasted. Her eyes were on Miss Brand's face. When she spoke, her own voice sounded faint to her, she wondered if they could hear her, and when she lifted her voice she seemed to be calling to them, in a tone that could not reach them. Her voice — abruptly its tones seemed to her a frail bridge across which alone she could reach them, if at all, from out her terrible isolation. She was aware of Lawrence, watching her with alarm and concern, aware of the others, who were about to slip from this subject and, she thought queerly, never get back to it. She was speaking now and they were all listening:

"But what about all those people," she asked, "who brought you the ill luck? The pension people, the driver, the one who had fever. . . ."

Miss Brand stared. "Bless you," she said, "they had nothing to do with it. It was I — I — I! I attracted it."

"But they sowed all those seeds!" Marfa cried. "Some one was bound to pick them up. . . ."

"To attract them," Miss Brand assented. "And that one was I."

Marfa felt young, impotent, desperate. Their faces swam about her. She addressed herself to Lawrence's face.

"The attraction," she said, "may have been accidental. But the one who creates and scatters all the ill luck — the accident, the illness, the trouble — what of that one?"

There was a moment's silence — but no one save Lawrence was really attending. Maud Brand was merely waiting to talk again herself. Anthony Beach was a polished surface over which all contacts trickled with faint chance at any reaction. The ordered eye of Mrs. Beach was appraising the dessert that had just been brought in. Lawrence alone was watching Marfa, and with a frown, as if he wished that she wouldn't go on.

"Because," said Marfa clearly, "I'm like that. I bring misfortune to every one I meet. I've always done that all my life."

She sat with eyes downcast, waiting for the confusion which it seemed to her that her words must bring, now that they were out. And she heard Mrs. Beach saying:

"You darling child. Imagine! Have lots of whipped cream on that."

"You bring good luck, Miss Marfa, merely by permitting us to look at you," said Anthony Beach. "Vina, are your cigarettes decent?"

Marfa's eyes went to Lawrence. He was looking at her not with amusement but with a gentleness that suddenly shook her, like pain.

Maud Brand began again:

"And then, I remember, there was once in Normandy . . ."

As they came out on the terrace, Maud asked of Lawrence, "Where did you go this morning?" with a manner of casualness, but with a direct and listening look. Marfa felt astonishment, but Lawrence answered simply: "For a canter — and a gallop, with Miss Manchester."

"I had thought we might finish the chapter . . ."

"I'll get the book now. Perhaps the others would care to join us. . . ." He moved away.

Miss Brand's voice sounded sharp and piping. "But I have had hardly a word with you to-day!" Her voice was like the voice of some untutored mother to her child.

Marfa went to Mrs. Beach and slipped her hand through her arm.

"Cousin Malvina," she cried, "I'm going home to-morrow — I must go home to-morrow!"

Mrs. Beach stood in the sun, which seemed to shine round her as round a heavenly body, reflecting light but by it unmoved. She stood serene, unsurprised, completely prepared, apparently regarding nothing as unpreventable.

"You can't leave," she said in her mellow alto. "You really must go with us to-morrow to see the charming place I want the Brands to buy — quite close to us it is. Just our little party — with a car and a hamper. You can't resist the lake — and there's wintergreen. . . ."

Marfa faced her. In a sharp effort to force understanding on her, she leaped the generation between them:

"Vina! You mustn't pass it over. What I said at the table is true. I'll bring down something terrible on all of you if I stay. I oughtn't to have

come . . . I thought I could get away from it. You mustn't let me bring trouble and unhappiness to this house, too. . . ."

Through the haze of Marfa's tears, Mrs. Beach's large serene face smiled out at her.

"Marfa, dear," she said, "we'll have you all over this nervousness if you'll only stay on and let us take care of you."

Marfa cried, as into some space wherein nothing registered: "But I'm not in the least nervous — it's true! It's true! "

"After all you've been through," Mrs. Beach said equably, "I don't wonder at anything you imagine. Go down in the garden and look at my hollyhocks. Around four, wouldn't you and Lawrence like some tennis? Tea will be at five."

From the garden, by the hollyhocks, Marfa heard Anthony Beach's staccato above her on the terrace:

"What they each need is a live and hearty and dangerous husband."

She heard Mrs. Beach's amused laughter, and then her mocking voice:

"And isn't that what I need too, Anthony? " And again: "The gigantic vanity of men — to think that all a woman lacks is a husband! " And later: "And, Anthony, only think! All

married men are so sure that their wives have exactly what they need. . . .”

“Well!” came his small, penetrating, terrier-like tone, “and haven’t you what you need?”

“Anthony!” she cried, with more laughter, “Anthony . . . I haven’t needed anything from anybody for years and years. I’m myself, my darling. Were the cigarettes right? They weren’t!” The rich variations of her compunction floated down into the garden.

Marfa thought: “At four o’clock. Nothing could happen to-day. I’ll put on my green muslin.”

As she put on her green muslin, she thought of Paul Barker. “How horrible that I should put on the very one. . . . But I don’t look well in tennis things. And I’ll be leaving in the morning.”

She came down on the terrace and found Miss Brand looking asleep in a deck-chair in the pergola. Lawrence was there, with an incense-stick. With it he signalled to Marfa, smiling, as if he expected her to understand. “She’s not asleep,” Marfa thought, and as if she had heard her, Miss Brand spoke without opening her eyes, and asked the time. “Wasn’t there to be some tennis?”

she asked, and when he did not reply: "Don't you want to go now?"

As Marfa looked from her distance, but sharply aware of them, it seemed to her as if something that was ordinarily invisible abruptly put forth its powers: as if the enormous energy of the sun, or the hidden beat of its manifestation as light, or the violent pressure and weight of the air seized on the scene and accented it, made it its own. She waited, expecting that some fine substance might crack with a sound and the pieces fly over the terrace. It was as if Maud Brand were the bad witch, making the pleasant scene intolerable. Still without opening her eyes, as Marfa joined them and Lawrence rose, Miss Brand said: "Miss Manchester, do you know how lucky you are to play tennis — play anything at all?" "Not as badly as I play," Marfa said. Miss Brand put out her hand and Lawrence helped her to her feet. She stood for a moment erect, pale, swaying a little. "I would give anything to have a game with you," she said. When Lawrence suggested pleasantly, "Come and try it," she flashed him a glance of black displeasure, put her hand to her side, and arched her brows. "Will you sit in the garden?" he suggested. "I'll go to my room," she said severely. She

moved to the door without looking at Marfa, who wondered, "Why be so solemn about it?" and rebounded her balls on the terrace with an air of pleasure.

The way to the courts lay through the garden. As they passed the intensely green grass before the hollyhocks, he broke the silence in which Marfa and he had walked down from the terrace, and said, "Let me stretch out here on the grass for a minute — do you mind?" and threw himself face downward at the foot of the hollyhocks.

He looked so tall. It was so that Paul Barker had looked in his coffin. And little Ben, when they had laid him on the river-bank, how tall, how tall he had seemed.

The hum of the garden was like the hum of some giant weaving. Color descended, green, blue, rose, yellow, violet — a current of color, sweeping down, but instead of pouring free through the air, it fashioned itself into bells, cups, and little suns, and the green into slim shapes that turned and quivered. The little lake lay beaten upon by gentle onslaughts of wind and light, and all the color of the air slid over it in vanishing patterns. The lapping water, the flowing air, the invisible tides of warmth and light,

these, she thought, were simple; the suns and the forces went on simply; she alone was complex. She and this man and his sister and Anthony Beach and all the people in and about her home, they were complex. Well, the suns and the forces were ordered. She and these others were not ordered — save Cousin Vina. How did one get organized, like the suns and the forces. . . .

Lawrence Brand sat up, and she looked into his face, serene, unshadowed, bright. All of a sudden she was saying:

“Do you feel sure about things? Everything?”

She hardly had time to think that if he looked puzzled she should dislike him.

“I used to,” he said. “I used to know just how everything ought to be.”

“Not now?”

“Now I know that I’m of no use on earth.”

His veined brown hands and arms hugged his knees; his brown eyes were marked with rays of burnt umber, the lids came to little crests which gave him always an upward look; his thick hair, brown too, pressed upward as if it were doing its utmost; his lips were sharply cut and colored; and there were his alert attention, his swift answers, his laughter. She made the inventory and summed up that which was not

in his look but in his air: "You must be, because you look so terribly tired." But he answered, with his way of replying before her sentence was finished: "Tired with wondering what I'm for!" Though her obvious answer was unspoken, he replied to it all the same: "If I even did well enough by Maud — but I don't. I irritate her. She'd be better with some one else, though she doesn't think so." He pulled up some grass and said: "My father left us enough to live on decently — and expected me to look after her." Then he looked at her in a manner of surprise, as if she had spoken. "Of course the modern way would be a nurse and a house," said Marfa, and added: "I expect that sounds brutal to you." "Not to me, of course," he answered; "but she suffers so frightfully — physically, I mean — that I can't bear to leave her. She's never free from suffering, really." Marfa suggested: "Is nobody thinking about *you*?" "Are you?" he asked. "Then thank you tremendously. And tell me this: do you honestly think I'd be such a lot better off in business, scrambling to make money or to get the best of the other fellow? Or in law, getting the wrong people put in jail, or keeping people out when they ought to be there, or fussing over their wretched squabbles?" She said:

"Well, there are other things . . ." "Most men don't find them—I never did. I should have gone along with the rest—sold stuff, made money, or done business in red ink. Are the college chaps any better off? Nobody's of much use. But I've never got reconciled to being of no more use than most of them are." Marfa stared at him. "But what about getting the most out of one's life?" she asked. He shrugged and grinned, and looked at her appraisingly. "Are they—all the others—doing that?" he wanted to know. "Are you?" he demanded. She said: "Oh, I . . ." and added: "I'm not in that. I'm not counted. I've been left out of it. Do you think," she asked him gravely, "that I can be the devil?" He accepted this transfer of attention from himself to her, said, "You're a pretty little devil, if you are," and, unable after all to sustain the transfer, rose and proposed: "Let's play."

The court was a vessel brimming with milky light, with shapes of shadow lapping at the edges like dark tongues. The air had a certain odor—fruity, fresh, almost snowy. The green went round them with a sense of motion, and the unclouded sky had emerged from its distance and seemed ready to spread itself down, to show what

was beyond. He played an admirable game, as if his unappeased desire for excellence had expressed itself so. In her effort to hold her own, Marfa felt confused and insistent, against the large color and the long silence of the day. He beat her so shockingly that she said, as they walked back to the house for tea: "Perhaps you are the one person in the world to whom I shall not bring ill luck."

"You've made me unchivalrous already," he reminded her; and then said slowly: "But it's bully luck to have met you at all, you know. Don't, for the Lord's sake, go home — or go anywhere," he begged.

"I'm going to-morrow," she told him.

Tea, after all, was indoors, was spread in the wide hall, because the light had hurt Maud Brand's eyes. The hall was dim and high, and as the two entered, the figures about the table seemed remote — a man and two women seen through the small end of a field-glass, very far, very clear, and made of some other substance, harder and brighter than flesh. Maud in heavy white, since she was always chilly; Mrs. Beach in thin white, since she was always warm; Anthony Beach, in white flannel trousers; and all three so

serious, going painstakingly through their ceremony. The gravity of their considerations, "Two lumps? Lemon? Hot water?" seemed abruptly laughable, as to two arriving from the stars.

"Had you a good game?" Maud asked. She spoke without expression in voice or face. It was as if the blank and blind side of a bowl had given utterance, an utterance without inflection, emitted from unexpected lips, thin and almost motionless, below painted eyes, pale and somnolent. Lawrence, whom she had addressed, said, "Great, thank you," the vitality of his words hardly accenting the intense vitality of his presence, all pulsing, like the body of a glowworm, with life, burning brightly. Mrs. Beach's "Were the courts in condition?" was like a motif of music, sounding in its appointed place, pure and accurate and expectable. And her husband's plaintive "This new man doesn't seem to have the knack, somehow," was spread over the talk like a thin brown ash, useless and without nourishment to any conversation. There came to Marfa a faint impression that all these words, these presences, these beings were no more than so many motions, no more than so many sounds in the quiet hollow of the room, itself barely disturbed by the invasion. But this was too much for

her, she could not think it through, and she retired into the bright security of praising the muffins.

Anthony Beach suddenly asserted himself — manifestly feeling a sudden need to be positive and dominant, saying: "What a day! A day to make a man feel like running a race!" He threw back his shoulders, braced his legs, flourished his hand and — sipped his tea. His wife said rapidly, and without looking at him: "How virile of you, Anthony." Maud Brand, her eyes turned a bit away toward the baseboard of a wall, which she most often addressed, spoke with an air of pain and wonder: "How would you like never to feel as if you wanted to move from your chair or your bed? I suppose really that's the way with me." Her words went over the group like a fog, quenching everybody.

Marfa sat miserably in her high-backed chair, the flush of her exercise gone from her face, her eyes dulled, some protective web, which she usually wore, now all torn and ravelled. When Mrs. Beach asked her to have sugar, she accepted with the fervor of some escape, and took three lumps, as if in sheer refuge. Then she leaned forward remorsefully and said loudly: "Oh, Miss Brand, that must be terrible!" Miss Brand

turned, focussed upon her, and said dryly: "It is." At this Lawrence resolutely set himself to talk, manifestly somewhat at random, about a French fishing-village whose name he said that he could not remember. When, in the midst of this, a diversion was caused by the arrival of more hot water and muffins, he turned, looked at Marfa sitting beside him, and said low: "Don't go home to-morrow." But she answered: "I must, I must!" He went on softly: "Then it's because you want to get away from us—and I don't know that I blame you for that . . ." He went on like this softly.

Mrs. Beach had turned to a portfolio to look for an etching of a village in Brittany which she remembered. There was a moment of silence.

Then Miss Brand's voice broke over the group, as if a dead thing had abruptly received some charge and could make the motions of life. She turned suddenly full upon Marfa. "Miss Manchester," she said, "Mrs. Beach tells me that you are most interesting. Do tell me about your work." Marfa felt as if some terrific light had been cast upon her from a point intolerably near. "I have no work," she said, trembling. "No work!" cried Miss Brand; "then you must find it very difficult to make yourself interesting.

How do you manage?" At the surprise of the onslaught, Marfa was shaken as by a blow, as by a series of blows. "Don't you see," she said faintly, "that I am not interesting." Miss Brand put down her cup, set her elbows on the arms of her chair, joined her hands loosely, and bent upon Marfa the terrible batteries of her attention. It was as if a lioness, idle and absent in its cage, had abruptly focussed all its secret animal strength upon a face beyond the bars. "Oh, but you must be interesting!" she cried. "You are bound to be. You are so small and lovely — so feminine. Men must adore you. Don't men adore you?" If there had been in her tone a hint of disdain or amusement, Marfa might have combatted it; but there was only this powerful rancor, manifested not in voice or expression but in mute detonations that could not be met or measured. Marfa remained silent, tried to meet those merciless eyes, wavered, and dropped her own. The questions went on, charged with that fierce vitality: "Come now — do you sing? Do you play? Do you dance divinely? Or is it some art which cannot be practised before such as I?" She threw herself back in her chair and regarded Marfa with half-closed eyes. "What is the secret of your charm?" she asked, her look immovably

upon Marfa's face. Marfa's dry lips managed a phrase, "I am a woman without charm"; on which Maud Brand cried: "The most dangerous sort! All the Circes are without charm! It is worse than I feared! What do you do — that is so enticing?"

Lawrence, who had seemed root-bound, now sprang up, moved toward his sister, said sternly: "Let's go and read a while." She appeared not to know that he was there, that he had spoken. Now in her own voice there began to sound a broken tremolo, barely detectable, shaking the tone as strong wind upon taut wire. "Come!" she cried, "how ever do you manage it?"

Here Anthony Beach set down his cup obliviously, obliviously remarked that this Chinese tea looked deceptively weak, and joined his wife, saying as he did so: "My dear, you always seem to be looking for something." To which she replied absently: "Can it be that I have lost you, Anthony?"

"That next chapter — it was one of the best . . ." Lawrence strove to say.

"You have been in no haste to go on with it," Maud Brand said to him, her eyes not turned from Marfa. "And now I am interested. I am running something down. All my life I have

wondered about the charm of women — how do they hold men? Women who couldn't hold me for an hour seem to interest men unconscionably. Why is it? I never could see. Now I mean to make this charming, charming creature help me out. You will help me out, won't you, my dear?" she cried, still with that bent brow, that gaze from eyes that did not waver.

Marfa got to her feet, feeling ill, feeling poisoned, as by some intolerable miasma released about her. She glanced up at Lawrence, and the distress on his face gave her power to reply. "You are talking quite flattering nonsense," she forced herself to say coolly, and moved to join the Beaches. But Miss Brand's hot hand shot out and clasped her wrist. "Come," she cried again, "I'm a poor sick creature, without power and without glory. Give me lessons in womanly charm!" She broke into low laughter, which seemed to shake her, as she might have been shaken by uncontrollable anger. "Give me lessons in fascination!" she cried. "It will be quite safe with me — I shall never use it. But how it would amuse me to know what women do. . . ." Her laughter ceased suddenly, her hand still clung to Marfa's wrist, but she leaned back and sat motionless, her breathing strained and intensified.

Marfa could feel how her slight body was shaken, as by the release of some current, a current bearing away her strength, so that her hand fell nerveless, and she sat with closed eyes.

As if that release of energy were pushing at her, Marfa moved away, reached the table where the Beaches were examining etchings.

"I think," said Mrs. Beach, "that it may have been this of Saint Malo. Sweet little place, Saint Malo. I remember once . . ."

Her gentle, accurate tones went on about Saint Malo, and about what she remembered. It was as if the precision of her could not be disturbed, could not even be aware of the terrible invisible violences of another, in her presence.

"That's the place," Anthony Beach burst out, "where I had the perfect *turbot*!" But he was merely oblivious, at the other end of some undetectable scale of possible reaction.

Maud Brand rose. "I am ill," she said, with difficulty; "I feel as if I were dying."

Lawrence, Mrs. Beach, Anthony, brought her water, brought her brandy, led her to her room. She moved away like a sleep-walker, like one without the energy of any form of life. Marfa stood trembling, still beaten upon by those monstrous currents which had been generated and

let loose before her. She thought: "She poisoned herself — she poisoned me. It was as dense and fearful as a gas. She is killing him. . . ." She thought: "I don't see how I can leave him."

The first chimes sounded for dinner. Marfa went down the stairway, listened on the landing, listened in the hall. She thought: "If I were to go into the drawing-room and find her there alone, I should die of terror." She felt like an animal moving from covert to covert. "An animal," she thought, "afraid of a charge of words, as once they were afraid of wilder strength than their own." At the door of the drawing-room she paused.

Lawrence was there alone. He hurried toward her. He was not pale, he did not look distressed, but he seemed drained of vitality, of breath. "How can we apologize to you?" he said, very low. She liked him for that plural, she murmured something, and he went on: "She is very ill — she is not accountable. . . ." In a moment she was trying to comfort him in his sharp embarrassment. "I expect now you'll be getting away from here as soon as possible," he said sadly. "God knows, I can't blame you." She said nothing. "Is it early to-morrow?" he asked. "Shall I not

see you after to-night?" She stood looking up at him, the bright carved lips, the brows irregularly drawn, the eyes with their pointed lids and sharp lights. She thought that he seemed to be looking at her from a net. She said: "I wish that you were leaving too." But at that he smiled ironically, and mocked her: "If only I were going to some board of trade now — to buy or sell, and yell like a comanche — and play a man's part!" She asked: "No — but what would you like to be doing?" "I'd like best," he said gravely, "to be talking with you. But not always in snatches. Are you really leaving to-morrow?" He wandered down the room, looked at a print, struck a chord on the piano, turned and looked at her, saying: "Well, I suppose I'm never to see you again. That's all right. I don't need anybody or anything. No one does." She remained standing at the far end of the room. The low lights left them hardly visible to each other. They were like two on opposite sides of a curtain of light and color, on opposite sides of a physical chasm, calling to one another. She said nothing and he called roughly, "Good-by — good-by!" then came toward her, and said: "Will you do this one thing for me? Will you stay over to-morrow? I can't explain — but being with you is the first

rest I've had in — in nine years. Will you stay over to-morrow?" Suddenly she spoke as if a weight had been lifted. "I expect I'll bring you something hideous," she told him, "but — yes. I'll stay." "Thank you . . ." he said fervently, under his breath. He stood quietly looking at her, at her hair and her face. She thought: "He's so wretched with that woman around, that anything helps." "Thank you no end," he was saying. "I can't tell you . . ."

A high-pitched voice cried rapidly, "Then tell *me* — oh, pray do!" and Maud came into the room.

Lawrence said: "You weren't coming down, you were going to bed — your headache . . ." She cried: "Yes, but my boredom! I wanted company — such good company!" She was looking ill but really lovely, in green, thin and shining, like the scales of a transparent fish. Her graying hair was bound with brilliants, the lines of her frankly bony neck were set off by a chain of jewels. Her thin shoulders, thin arms, flat breast, and frail body seemed to tremble with a restless light which escaped from her only in her heavy-lidded eyes. She passed by Lawrence and came directly to Marfa and said, with mocking distinctness: "How are you this evening, you small

thing?" Marfa stood rigid, saying she did not know what.

Mr. and Mrs. Beach came in together. "Anthony sends his pearl buttons to the laundry regularly," said Mrs. Beach, "and we never fail to be late for every dinner, in consequence. Shall we go out?"

"Then why doesn't it occur to her to give me another set?" Anthony Beach inquired.

She said: "Anthony, if I think of you all the time, how can I be diverted to your buttons?"

Miss Brand's look went back to Marfa's face.

"May I please," she said, in her high, swift voice, "sit by Miss Manchester?"

"I knew you two would like each other," said Mrs. Beach. Also Anthony Beach, absorbed in the external, facing toward the excellent dinner which he foresaw, saw nothing else.

The dinner was to Marfa, nightmare. The attention, the extravagant courtesy, the bright motionless look laid upon her, were not less than devilish. It was so that some unearthly imp might press his look upon a victim, shadowing, by a mental torture, physical tortures to come. "I think so. Don't *you* think so, Miss Manchester?" — with that abrupt turning of the batteries upon Marfa, body leaning sidewise toward her, face

outthrust, eyes relentlessly waiting, and all that breathless hanging upon Marfa's reply: "I'm not sure — do let us hear what Miss Manchester has to say." And again: "Wait, wait — I'm sure Miss Manchester has an opinion on this." Marfa gathered all her power and tried to be quiet, to be unaware of this contrivance to discomfort her. She spoke gently and reasonably, replied sincerely. But the more rational she was, the more the woman insisted. Lawrence was wretched and helpless. Anthony Beach noticed nothing, but introduced both golf and the market, only to have them die. At last Mrs. Beach, from out her harmony, was aware that something preposterous was occurring, and looked with faintly troubled eyes at Maud Brand, who had just cried: "Oh, Miss Manchester — I *long* to know your ideas on spiritual things. What do you think of the virgin birth?" Marfa said gravely, "How original of you to be interested," and sat trembling, while Lawrence rushed into more breathless and random talk, talk during which his sister listened with downcast eyes, with an air of waiting, and then went back to it: "No, but really what *do* you think . . ." Mrs Beach now said to Lawrence, "She is not well . . ." and Maud cried; "Oh, very, very well to-night, Mrs. Beach!

I expect to set out early in the morning to see our new house. And this house that we think of buying — Miss Manchester, we must surely have your opinion on that! You're not leaving to-morrow?" Marfa met her eyes steadily, even smiled, and said: "No, not to-morrow. I'm going with you to see the new house."

At the end of dinner, exhausted as by some violent physical experience, Maud Brand went to her room.

In her own room Marfa wept. She thought: "I even bring out the worst in her. Some one else could soothe and make her herself — I excite her, make her quite devilish. It's the ghastly way I do everything. . . ." She thought: "I mean to be right — and Maud Brand is ill and bitter, and yet I do the same kind of harm that she does." She looked into the dark and thought: "Harm? What is harm? We're all grovelling along together." And later: ". . . war and pestilence needed to keep down the population. Then people like me must be co-operators with war and pestilence. Breed and kill, breed and cause death — but I don't breed! I'm death, and no more. . . ."

She sat at her dark window. There was a heavy ripple and tearing of thunder, as if some unthinkable fabric were for a moment shaken free, like a

banner, in a giant wind, and then were split and tossed away, with wild footsteps running after. She looked and listened and felt a rod thrusting through all, silent, motionless, unshaken, too powerful to doubt, too frail to touch. . . .

The morning was blue and broken with clouds, froth-white, as if the rushing currents of air had thrown up snowy foam from their viewless waves. The car made its way like a thing escaped from ten thousand years of life as dead metal, and motionless tree, and now at last set free in flight. In its speed was the spirit of the old adventures of galleon and sail. In the long slow wash of the centuries there had returned a rhythmic stress upon picturesque accomplishment, so that flight over road and through high space were the logical inheritors of the flight of the corsair and the god.

Between Mrs. Beach and Lawrence sat Marfa, thankful for the weary quiet of Maud Brand, leaning relaxed and abstracted beside Anthony Beach, who drove. Now Anthony came alive, perhaps felt his heirship to corsair and god, and, with an air of light and leisure, co-operated rather than presided at the wheel. Mrs. Beach sat dreaming and tranced, her eyes manifestly seeing in

space some lovelier geometry than that which lived in form. Lawrence had sunk beside Marfa with a joyous "Thank God," and she was aware of him, form and spirit, and reaches of being to which his eyes merely alluded.

Not two months, she thought, since she and her family had motored away with Marcus Bartholomew, had swerved aside to visit Garvin. Not two months since with Uncle Marshall and Aunt Phoebe and Ben and Bessie, they had motored to The Dells. Hardly three months since Paul Barker had been driving her about Old Town. On the deep blue of the sky she saw Marcus Bartholomew, on the deck of a vessel, beside her father, on a camel in a dark pass, on a wobbly boat on an inland sea — dead and tall, like Paul and Ben and Lawrence — oh, not Lawrence! *He* was here — yet. "I haven't killed him yet," she thought, "and I've only crippled Max Garvin. . . ." She hid her face in her hands. Lawrence said, "Oh, I say!" and slipped his arm about her; and Mrs. Beach sat, tranced and dreaming, presumably following the patterns of a farther geometry. All the way to Fairhaven, Maud Brand scarcely spoke.

Fairhaven. Its lake harbored no more than a small white launch and a blue canoe. It lay

twenty miles from the Beachs', and looked in the noon light like a place of colored clays, carefully modelled and laid upon the valley. There was a story — a bankrupt, a forced sale, a dispersal, and now the long house, so innocently unaware, lay alone, empty of motion. It did not yet look deserted, not even expectant; it wore still its air of confident household, certain of its right to be owned and occupied. The house was like a widow of thirty, not too regretful, not yet anxious, and warmed by a quite lovely complaisance.

Lawrence fitted the key and they entered the hall. It did not meet them, like a "furnished" passage, but presented an aspect of conscious aloofness, as does a portrait. This place seemed no more attentive to Lawrence, seeing in it a possible home, than to Maud, who at once scorned it, or to Mrs. Beach, who met it with a look as blank as its own, or to Anthony, wondering if the fireplaces would draw, or to Marfa, entering with the open gaze of one recollectedly facing something never before seen — that new and burnished experience.

The square living-room, empty, expressionless; the dining-room, where voices seemed hardly to have ceased; the kitchen, carrying yet its air of former activity. Marfa said suddenly that it was

a brutal thing for one family after another to live in the same house — “setting echoes and impressions on one another, mixing all the pictures.” At this Maud Brand turned upon her a stricken face and said: “That’s the kind of thing that I might have thought of — once. Not any more.” Marfa flushed, affirmed that it wasn’t much to think of, and heard Anthony Beach saying: “I didn’t quite catch that.” At this, Maud smiled at her, quite gaily — they smiled together, and Marfa felt warmed and reassured, and Lawrence, seeing, grinned comfortably. The sun smote warmly on some tiles, the breeze might be heard rippling without, and a kingfisher rasped joyously along the water. It was a moment of bright color, of bright sound, a moment revealing no more than the bright form of casual human relationship; but it moved over the three like some unexpected light. Anthony Beach was examining the drafts, and Cousin Vina was saying that the rooms would open up well for entertaining. Marfa thought: “They are always casual and happy and matter of course. It is only Lawrence and she — and I — who are tragic. Is it only because we are young?” Perhaps Cousin Vina and Cousin Anthony had been tragic and had forgotten it. Perhaps they were tragic now

and didn't notice it. They might have the same turmoils, only they didn't take it so hard. . . . She speculated on what might be their tragedies, thought of debt, disagreement, weariness of each other, love of some one else, and dismissed all these cases as shadowy beside her own.

The rooms of the upper floors turned on their visitors blind and startled faces. On the dead air of these rooms were printed voices and dreams. On a shelf lay a woman's glove. "No," Lawrence murmured, "it isn't decent to live in a house where others have lived." But now Marfa had changed her mind, and told him that he was intellectually exclusive, and should be willing to lay his gloves where other gloves had been. He fell behind the others and said: "Good God, if I were looking at this house with you. If it were to be our home. . . ."

As they emerged on the grass terrace above the toy lake, abruptly the silence which had wrapped Maud Brand was broken by her laughter. She must have heard his words, for she turned on Marfa and cried: "Well? Do *you* like the house? Should *you* like living here?" Marfa replied, "Extremely," and Maud said with slow significance: "When we are living here, you must come one day and see us." Mrs. Beach looked at them,

vaguely troubled, and her husband cried heartily that there was a good exposure for the garden.

For no reason they now dispersed, Maud walking alone and rapidly toward some flaming zinnia beds, Marfa to the lake, the others as pleased them, save Lawrence, held by Anthony in talk about fertilizer. From the edge of the lake Marfa stared at the house, white and innocent in its glossy trees. She looked until it wavered and brightened at the edges, flowed into the green and gleamed like marble in the sun. She rested her eyes in the green and looked back at the house to find faint rose and violet clouding over it. The zinnias were flaming shores of color rising on either side of the gray current of the walks, flooding smoothly toward the lake. The smooth white walls of the house, the smooth green sheet of the lawn, the smooth blue water, and the tide of color and gray walks gave her a shock of pleasure. When she saw Lawrence freed from Anthony and hurrying toward her, she smiled at him brightly and said: "You know, it's heaven, really. This heavenly place, these pleasant people walking about. What are we frightened of? What are we disagreeable about? What are you sad about?" He replied: "Well, I am happy." They walked by the lake. The little

waves curled on the soft sand gently, like kittens at play. The shadows seemed cut from another substance, of a sharp hard brightness. To look on the bright water and then to look back on the bright mounded green gave clarity beyond the power of the eye to sustain. Countless forms and colors seemed to lie just beyond the eye, which however did not strive but rested content on the red canoe, the white launch; and the sky, of the blue of the virgin's robe.

"I've played at life," Lawrence had said. "Don't be solemn — we all play at life," she assured him. "No, but I ought to have something to offer to a woman — a good grocery business, or something." "Women don't want groceries." "Yes, but they do. They think they don't — but when they see other women's husbands' grocery or profession, they want one too. Wouldn't you?" She said: "I've never thought of any of that." The words that flowed between them were motions, no more, carrying on a commerce of ideas with which neither was much concerned. The words made a causeway over which ran loneliness and young despair and young boredom. These two vortices announced themselves to each other through the blind medium of words, uttered at random, carrying nothing of the force

behind the utterance. Not of love. Chiefly of a desire for refuge. The search — more primitive than love — the search for a place of refuge from wild beasts.

Two talking by a lake. They sat on an old rustic bench and stared around, and stared at each other. Refuges for each other, in the current of they knew not what. Maud Brand came walking toward them. She stepped carefully, as a cat steps, lifting her white-shod feet. The Beaches, murmuring comfortably, were examining the rock-garden. Maud had left them and came walking toward the two talking comfortably on the old rustic bench. They did not hear her. They saw only each other and the flowing green and blue of leaves and lake. Lawrence, brown, compact, with his lifted pointed eyelids, was saying: "You don't know what it is — you and this place — and the thought of living here with you. I find I've always been mad about you. . . ."

He looked up and saw his sister. She was standing quite close to them, looking down at them over her left arm; her long eyes appeared slanted and half closed in the sun. And perhaps because of his longing to have his life conditioned like that of others, he pretended that it was so, and

merely looked up at her lazily, reached out his hand, and said:

"Hello, sis. How would you like to have Miss Manchester for a sister — eh?"

With some shred of a *savoir-faire* which had never left her, save in dealing with those nearest to her, she miraculously met this:

"Jolly!" she said lightly. "Oh, very. But yet would it be so jolly? — for Miss Manchester, of course I mean."

But the acid in her was stronger than any *savoir-faire*. "How ever did you come to think of that?" she now asked.

"Nearly any one would have thought of it," he returned coolly.

"Oh? Even Miss Manchester herself?"

"I'm hoping so," he said simply.

She looked at Marfa. "He does well to consult me," she said. "For whoever he marries will have to have me about all day. Doesn't that terrify you?"

Marfa looked up at her mutely. She was desperately trying to remember herself as she had been with others, as she had been at home, able to say what she would like to say. She thought of herself with Marcus Bartholomew, and she so scornful, so competent with scorn and with

words. She remembered herself, so superior, so sure, before her mother. And Luna! Why could she not wither this woman as she was accustomed to devastate poor Luna? But Marfa sat there mutely, even forcing her lips to a faint smile.

"She knows you'd be a sport," Lawrence insisted to Maud without much conviction. "However, she's not even considering me, I'm afraid," he added.

Maud turned her stiff white length so that she seemed in the sunshine to blaze down upon Marfa like a goddess. "Don't mind him," she said. "I should warn you: he talks like that to every woman we meet."

Not the words but their vindictiveness suddenly shattered Marfa, as if there had fallen upon her a mighty mass of physical substance.

"I have been simple enough to take him seriously," she said coldly. "I am going to marry him — if he is serious."

Maud Brand looked at them, expressionless, silent. Marfa's look fluttered down from her face, which seemed to flatten, as if some enveloping and rounding haze were torn away. The face became terrible, as if it had terror of its own, like lava.

"Then I'm the first to wish you happiness,

God bless you! " she said. The words fell like some casual and frightfully wonted curse. She turned and walked along the shore of the lake, away from them, away from the house and the gardens.

" You didn't mean it," said Lawrence just above his breath.

" Of course I didn't mean it. You haven't even asked me."

" I do ask you."

" We met each other yesterday."

" Don't be absurd! "

Vortices, announcing themselves to each other in the search more primitive than love, the search for a place of refuge from wild beasts.

He broke into a bald recital of that which he had never before uttered:

" She was never right. As a child she had rages that left her ill for days. It wasn't her fault — it was my father's fault. He wasn't — in his family he wasn't a man of good-will. He took offense — looked for slights — resented everything. He had meant to be a senator, he was a promoter and a miner to his death — so he always insisted on his own importance. His eyes were pointed and he had no eyebrows, and his face had veins all over it when he spoke out sharply. All this he took out on my mother. In society he was agreeable, and

foolish with women — always paying compliments and saying ‘Ladies, ladies!’ My mother told me that before Maud was born he would come into the house and not speak to her. When she complained, he would show her a terrible attention — defer to her in a loud voice, show a false heartiness, a false tenderness, put a frightful emphasis on everything that he said to her, force her to talk. My mother told this to Maud too — it may have been this that marked her, or it may have been the fact of my father himself. Was it not strange — a man like that, and yet as honest as he was about the mines. . . . At dinner, last night, I could see my father’s face, all veins, there in Maud’s face. . . . As a girl at school, no one could be friends with her — she made every one miserable.

“Then Allen came. Allen Oxley. I remember when he met her. She became an angel. In his presence all her beauty and her fineness lived — no one could have been more exquisite. They were engaged — like that! She was happy, she was perfect. We were all happy, even my father became himself and was gentle — and my mother was like a star. We had seven weeks of knowing what life could be like when people know how to live.

"But one day — it was a matter of the wedding-gown. A girl from the shop in town had brought it all the way out, and they were trying it in the back parlor — it was a great ugly old house. My mother was there. I was on the veranda when Allen came up. I went with him into the front parlor. And we heard Maud. She was screaming at the girl, about the dress.

"Allen threw open the door — no one could have stopped him. My sister stood there, in her wedding-gown and veil, screaming at the frightened girl. He stood watching her. When she looked in his face she knew that it was the end.

"From that day she has never tried any more. The terrible rages have left her — she doesn't seem to have energy for them. But there is this cold devilishness. . . . Sometimes I think if Allen had married her, he could have kept the angel in her alive. She has killed it — she carries about in her the strangled body of her angel. . . ."

He was dry-eyed, but he was drawing strange sobbing breaths. Her hands were fiercely on his.

"But you — you . . ." she said, "that is your life. . . ."

He said: "You see, I can't ask any one to share

it. And I can't leave her . . . I can't do that. . . ."

Marfa cried: "Of course you can leave her! It's wicked to ruin your life. . . ."

He muttered: "You don't understand. I'm not perfect! I devil her, as I did just now about marrying you. . . ."

"Then you don't want to marry me? "

He took her in his arms, and now, for the first time, seeing all that he had suffered, and since perhaps she was not to have him, she felt for him a rush of tenderness.

Some time later Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Beach emerged from the gardens and came toward the lake. Innumerable clouds, waved and white, lay cupped in the smooth water, now of the pallid blue of noon. The images of elms were delicately stitched about the shore. Bright peace was on the sunny green, and the faint sombreness of the shadows was no more than the fine obscurity of a thought, or a cessation of motion upon glossy ripples, half invisible. The vast pulse beating, recurrent sunshine and shadow smote upon mineral, vegetable, animal, upon body and mind of the human being, upon event, mood, and upon all manifestation of life.

Without his glasses, Anthony Beach looked as if some one had expressed him in another language.

"Vina," he said, "do you like this place better than our own?"

She regarded him with an air of stupefaction and replied: "It wouldn't occur to me to want it."

"You don't seem to want anything, my dear," he said, with annoyance.

She looked at him, with her clouded smile, her eyes puzzled and perhaps trying to find their way back to some remembered unrest. After a moment she said: "Sometimes I think there must be another way to be conscious than by owning things — and people. Only not you, Anthony," she enigmatically added.

She went forward leisurely, her green gown, her ash-blond hair, her slow motions toned to the garden and to the day.

"Damn," said Anthony, and followed her.

"Where's Maud?" Mrs. Beach asked Lawrence and Marfa.

As they rose they made ambiguous gestures towards the bend in the shore along which she had walked when she left them. Anthony said that they must be getting to So-and-so for lunch.

His wife's eyes were on the farther shore, on the many greens pierced by light points, motionless in the coolness and the warmth of the perfect day. Only the poplar leaves and the locust leaves stirred a little, a drunken bee hurled his body against Marfa's blue gown, and a kingfisher stammered in his incessant search for food. Across a far bridge the roll of wheels came softly, and the water slapped and fondled at the sides of the white launch and the red canoe. "She went that way," Lawrence said, and looked, and they all walked along the shore, looking.

At the bend they saw her, sitting on a bench in the strong sunlight. They walked toward her slowly, and discussed the ownership of the little launch, the danger of canoes, and the picturesqueness of sail-boats. They went walking towards Maud, these four, and felt gay and at ease in the pleasant sunlight, felt light-hearted and gentle and without any violent preoccupation. And Maud Brand did not turn or look towards them.

They came quite close to her, and she had not turned. Then something in the aspect of her shoulder, her head, her hands, fixed their look sharply upon her. It was Lawrence who cried out and ran to her.

Her head had fallen sidewise, her hands lay in strange lines of relaxation. Her hat had tipped forward, her lips were parted.

It was wild and terrible to see the inanimate where they had looked for the animate — a shattering breach of trust in the order of things. She looked as if disintegration were already upon her. She must have been dead for quite half an hour, for her hands and her face were already cold. Innumerable clouds, waved and white, lay cupped in the smooth water, still of the pallid blue of noon.

Silence and suspension in the house, now that the telegrams were sent, and the men from town were busy, there in the guest-room. The aspect of the house was altered. All its currents flowed differently. The comfortable objects of use existed no longer in their own right, but as tributary to the one controlling circumstance. The change was not only in the mind of those in the house; assuredly the change was in the objects themselves. These withdrew, were diminished, were lowered in some rate of being. And death was seen to be not the negative, but the powerful positive, the dominant in that house.

Through the terrible difference of the journey

home following that glossy car in which Maud Brand rode alone, and the arrival before frightened faces, Marfa moved as one webbed and netted. Through that dense haze, shadowed as by some looming bulk, she saw Anthony Beach's agitation, an emotion expressible only in vast indignation; saw Cousin Vina's calm all overlaid with tears and sobbing, slow tears, broken breaths — no shattering of her serenity but, instead, its slow bleeding. Beyond all she saw Lawrence, tense, wrapt, his pointed look fixed on some far place, his hands torturing each other. And if only he had said something, made some sound besides that thick breath, a groan without power to sustain itself, dying in his chest below closed lips.

As in some fearful sustained music, there came a pause, when she felt able to escape, and she hurried out by a side entrance and down to the garden. The phlox and the ageratum stood, blurred and artificial; the green looked gray; the sun might have been shining or might have been veiled. With the impulse for hiding, for burial, Marfa sat by some shrubbery and laid her face on the stone bench. Then the thought that she had been holding below the rim of consciousness shot up and glowed before her like a column of flame.

Against the sparkle of the lake, she saw again

the tortured face of Maud Brand, the javelins that thrust from her, the nerves that bled in her voice, the strange faceless figure whose look had long become the look of the dead. She saw herself, impersonal, a figure of bloom and tranquillity, smiling up at the poor palpitant thing, and striking at her with words that she did not mean. Now she saw that mutilated being, breathing its own miasma, moving blindly along the border of the lake, torn by the word that it had heard and had believed. The slight margin of being which had remained unpoisoned by its own decay had begun to emit its toxin of hate for the one creature whom she loved. In spite of her appearance of indifference, it had been her thought of Lawrence alone which had created in his sister the thin trickle of sweetness that had kept her alive. Now abruptly this changed to bitterness, and the organism could bear no more. . . . What if she was distraught, had made herself absurd? Here had been cause to quiet her with some gesture, and instead, she had been beaten to death, in sheer wantonness, by a word. . . .

A column of flame. Flame, figured with faces mocking at Marfa's certainty that this ruin, more fearful than all the others, lay before her as her own work. She had looked up by the lake, had

smiled, had said one sentence which she did not mean, and that sick creature had fallen, had sat on a bench in the sun, with her head sidewise, her arms strangely disposed, her lips apart.

"I do murder, and nothing but murder," Marfa said aloud, and beat on the stone with her closed hands.

Anthony Beach and Lawrence came from the house, Lawrence silent, Anthony demanding why the damned doctors had taken so long, and doubting their ability to tell what had killed her. When Lawrence saw Marfa, he said brutally to Anthony: "Excuse me, will you, sir? I must speak to her. . . ." The little man stared and murmured and trotted back toward the house.

Lawrence drew Marfa to her feet, sat beside her on the bench, held and cherished her.

She moved away from him; she cried: "If only I had gone yesterday — I knew! I knew!"

He did not understand her, muttered, "Thank God, you were here," and when she cried loudly, "But I killed her!" he stared at her as if she were mad.

"I said the words that ended everything for her . . ." said Marfa, with a manner of exhaustion. "It was only I . . ."

"Good God," said Lawrence. "Do you think

that moment was anything? It was the months and years when I should have been trying to heal her. . . .”

He seemed to take account of Marfa's case, and she set herself to tell him, went over and over it, finding it impossible to be articulate, trying to cry out like one tranced and saying nothing that reached him. “What is the use of pretending there's nothing in all this? I've watched this—I know. I bring misfortune, death to everybody. Don't comfort me. Help me. There must be a way to get out. . . .” Then she cried: “Oh, I'm thinking of myself even now. . . .” For an instant he was there before her, clear and brilliant, tense face, tortured hands, himself, living his life, meeting life and death, a being separate and tremendous, cut away from everything. For an instant she saw him so, as sharply as she sensed herself; then he merged again with the flow of all that was external to her, and she went on about herself: “I'm made of something that draws disaster. . . .” He said low: “Sometimes I've thought that Maud made her own misery—even her illness. That if she had been decent to people she would have been different. Every time she spoke, she seemed to poison herself. I've seen her talk with people whom I knew that she hated

or envied—and afterward she would be exhausted, like a runner . . . would find it difficult to breathe or to move—I think she poisoned herself. . . .” Marfa said low: “Maybe I do that to others. . . . But why? I’m not evil, I don’t hate anybody—I didn’t hate Paul Barker or little Ben. . . .” He said: “Don’t, don’t,” and held her, but she drew away from him and cried: “Maybe it’s because I’m nothing! I’m nothing, and the evil rushes in, and I give it off to people. . . .” And at this she broke into a passion of sobbing and cried: “I don’t want to be like that. I want to bring everything good and nothing bad. But I bring everything bad and nothing good—what is there for anybody like me?” He held her, murmured to her, and her words had not entered him.

The house door closed and Anthony Beach came out again, and with him one of the doctors. They came down the path in the dusk, two creatures, the one small and anxious, the other huge, attentive, sunk in routine. The doctor was presented to Marfa and began to speak to Lawrence: technical words, involved and running into one another, as one utters words too long familiar, to receive their due, or as a great singer forms words liquidly, as if some vast shape were being

builded from words, the words being nothing, the shape being all. But from this haze of sounds the import was thrust out and blazed up before them.

"Malignant." "Malignant."

With that word occupying the air, they walked to the house, spoke for a while with the other doctors; saw them go — three shapes holding power to twitch aside the curtain of the flesh and reveal its secret of cell but not of spirit. Or was it of spirit?

Mrs. Beach came into the room and something of her serenity spread through the air, faint and frosty, like a tranquil evening in September. They all drew together about a light fire. They said nothing, save Anthony, who tried to cheer them by telling an amusing story, at whose conclusion his wife laid her hand on his with a gesture that was very like compassion. And this he must have felt, for he found fault with the fire.

In her room, across the passage from the room where Maud Brand lay, Marfa moved in the darkness from window to window. In its fearful suddenness, the event seemed naked, having its implications revealed like ghastly members. A word could kill, a word had killed. That in her which made her speak the word had killed. This was absurd! What in her could have killed any

one or brought down all other misfortune. . . . She held her ear to her life and found her life empty. "I'm like anybody else," she kept defending, and tried to think of catastrophe induced by others. But one never knew about these. One knew only about oneself. One slew and stabbed, one wrecked and abandoned, one destroyed, and all in secret. One went with clean hands and innocent face, and no one knew. So everybody tried to comfort one, and the comfort might be accepted and believed, and life would go on as before. But if one wanted to meet this, to cleanse the stables . . . Here she lost the thread of it and went on standing by the window and repeating: to cleanse the stables. But then into the rectangle of lamp-light from a lower window a little animal loped, and she became absorbed in trying to determine whether it was a cat or a rabbit.

In the night she woke to a shivering horror, without any formula of thought. The sense of Lawrence stole over her, warm and like a home, but she drove it away: "I must let him go! I shall harm him more than she did. . . ."

She began to recall the tenor of her life, not now with regard to tragedy, but with regard to the trivial, the unconsidered. Small vortices, with herself as center:

The day when she, a little girl, had visited her father's sister, Aunt Esmeralda, a widow living in Chicago. Aunt Esmeralda, who seldom allowed herself a treat, took them all for a long ride on the cable-car, counting the fare from her little steel purse and inquiring anxiously about transfers. This aunt was a woman who constantly looked down her past and brought up little incidents, still bleeding: "That was the day he started South. I never saw him again." "She held my hand as she lay dying, but she didn't know me. Thought I was Minnie, that she couldn't bear. It was hard." "We went down cellar and there he lay, breathing heavy." In a life now without emotion, Aunt Esmeralda participated thus violently in her own past, or reviled her neighbors until she trembled. At the end of an afternoon of this, shrieked above the clangor of the cable-cars, she had turned to Marfa and inquired, as they sipped their tea in the kitchen: "Did you enjoy your ride?" And Marfa had answered: "Oh, it doesn't make me sick to ride in the street-car any more." Against the darkness she saw now her aunt's face, her flabby muscles drawn down with her disappointment, after all the cable-fares.

And once her father had brought her a silver bracelet, when she wanted one of gold. She

remembered, as he watched her unwrap the parcel, how his lips parted pleasantly in expectation of her delight, and the fashion in which his hand kept jerking upward from the wrist. But as the bracelet appeared, she had merely looked and kept on looking, not lifting her eyes, then slipped the bracelet on her arm without a word. Moments after she was torn by the patience with which he had looked away, as if it were all right; and she had said lamely, "When I'm happy I never can say anything, father," but had known that he was not deceived.

And once her mother had said, "How would you like to have a reception? I could borrow Mrs. Graf's dishes with the autumn leaves . . ." and she had replied loftily: "Mother! Young girls don't have receptions. They have teas." Now she saw again the fashion in which her mother had accepted this, nodding, looking a little away, as if she ought to have known. And once she had said, "Mother, sip your tea from your spoon only *once*, and after that drink it from the cup"; and her mother had said: "I'll remember." And then the "piece." One which her mother had learned to play in order to surprise her, and had played with careful accuracy, without announcement, on an evening when they had all

sat together. But the air interrupted a letter that Marfa was writing, and she had said, "Mother, would you mind not playing any more"; on which her mother, not hearing, absorbed in her own performance, and proud of it (since her fingers were a little stiff from rheumatism), said with pleased expectation: "Did you say 'Play it again'?" A dainty tragedy.

A train of such things — said and unsaid, or set at naught; and bright looks unregarded. She remembered that every one had such agonies, and that one either recalled and agonized, or forgot. She felt shamed and sentimental and then thought: "But even if it were not I. Are there not people so toned into things that nothing happens like that? People who don't draw such unhappy things to themselves any more than they draw tragedy. . . ." She was standing again by the open window in the chilly air, and she beat her hands softly together. But she felt a little proud, too, that she should be so sensitive and that such trifling things could pierce her.

She stayed through the third day, and laid an expensive wreath on Maud's coffin at the station. She sat with Lawrence for an hour that morning, and thought: "Already he speaks differently, has become his own man." He was absorbed with the

business thrust upon him, was not so deeply absorbed in her, and she had not yet liked him so much. Mr. and Mrs. Beach were to leave with him, Marfa herself was going home. He whispered: "The first minute I can, I'm coming to Old Town. Marfa, do you know that you're engaged to me?" She would not burden him now with her omens, and, besides, she wanted the comfort of his kiss. At this kiss Anthony Beach said "Well," just audibly, and Mrs. Beach looked tranquil.

But when the train took them, and Marfa had turned back to the station to await her own, she looked about on the people and thought: "Just by being where they are, I could bring any one of them death or unhappiness." There was a small woman in black with many buttons made like black raspberries. This woman had a seeking look, but not for anything material. She went peering about among the passengers, narrowing her short-sighted eyes, yet she seemed not to expect to find that for which she sought, but went on looking, by some compulsion. Abruptly Marfa imagined that large commonplace face thrown out of drawing by grief. "If she came to live at our house," Marfa thought, "I'd be certain to give her a salad that would make her ill, or to trip her down

some steps." She smiled at herself and nevertheless went on devising such things: the young girl with the eyes of one born at prayer; the old man who counted noiselessly and groaned audibly; the man and woman, both thin and both lame, who smiled at each other like two children at school and talked much and agreed, as if their companionship were from choice and their lameness incidental and forgotten — what would come over the lives of these if once they were to be touched by her? She walked among them, thinking of these things; and then remembered with annoyance: "Marcus Bartholomew would call this my form of romance."

She reached home that evening, and was received into the arms of her mother and Luna, who expressed their love in fussiness, in asking many questions, and in pathetically hastening to cover anything which they said and too late remembered might annoy her. But she looked at them and thought: "Even they are not safe. In the end I shall bring them both to disaster." Through the night she tried to face her situation and prayed: "God, if there are such people — without harmony — who bring destruction wherever they go, is there anything for them but

hell here and nothingness after . . . ?" For answer, there was the mocking face of Marcus Bartholomew in the darkness. She thought: "Perhaps I'm in love with him, and that's why I've turned to Lawrence. Perhaps all that love can be, for me, is to make traps to draw people in to be destroyed." She thought of herself with loathing, as one having no place with beings of earth, but instead an independent spirit, ravening among the forms. But Marcus Bartholomew had said: "You want distinction and, by Gad, you mean to have it, even if you identify yourself with the devil to get it." Yet there were the terrible facts of disaster and death which had actually followed her feet, her word, her whim. "Perhaps I *am* the devil. . . ."

Clear and pure, like the sound of music rising from dead wood and catgut, there soared and pierced her thought a thin awareness of herself. Not the one who lay there in misery, nervously remembering and fearing; not the one who had chosen this or that, inconsequent in mental functioning; not the mere pale bulk of muscle and bone woven together to make the form of her. None of these, but rather an awareness of one who rose and hung free, briefly looking down on the creature. As sharp as a cleavage of life from

death, she saw below her the substance of her form and knew herself to be not that. Was it in this form that there had been built, down God knew how many lives, some heritage of power to attract and dispense evil? What if she herself, hanging separate, intent and pure, were to knead at those cells as one kneads at substance. . . . She plunged into the mold of muscle, nerve, and brain curled beneath the covers, and lay laughing softly. Was she so romantic that she must split her own nature, so that one part might amaze the other? "Your form of romance," also, it might be. Yet there had been that one flash of freedom, of feeling herself some familiar and unfamiliar I. . . .

It was gone, and she fell asleep dreading her next day's visit to Max Garvin.

SHE entered the dining-room and saw her mother reading at the breakfast-table. Marfa asked "Where's Luna?" not as one who cares, but at her mother's reply she stared, arrested. "Gone to the hospital to see Mr. Garvin?" she repeated. "Why, Luna hardly knows him. . . ." "She feels responsible," her mother murmured, and Marfa cried hotly: "For the accident? How absurd, mama; she had nothing to do with his accident." Mrs Manchester seemed to use her rare grammatical errors for rich emphasis. "You speak jealous," she now said. Marfa flushed, said, "Luna is so . . ." and sat down. Her mother had closed her book — a volume of recipes — and was looking up at her with a patience, with an air of waiting, a look as of one who has waited for years to see a fruit-tree bear which, carefully tended, nonetheless never bears. "She usually stops in here to leave the thermos and the dishes," she volunteered; and when Marfa repeated, "'Usually'! Does she go every morning then?" Mrs. Manchester admitted that Luna had been at the hospital every morning since her sister had been

absent; and sat silent, still with that air of patience, that upward focussing look. Marfa said: "Mother, isn't it terrible for me to sit here and *know* that I've ruined his life too? . . ." To which her mother merely returned, "Oh, dear . . ." and added brightly: "Did you have a good time?" Marfa was silent and they heard the postman on the front veranda. Mrs. Manchester rose, and with short quick steps, a bit uneven, a bit stiff, ran to the door. Marfa thought: "She's young — her outline, her outside is young. But something has gone out of her — the haze, the sparkle, the hardness. . . ." Her mother came hurrying back with a letter. "It's not from papa!" she cried anxiously. "It's in a strange writing, from San Francisco. . . ." Marfa looked. "It's from Marcus Bartholomew," she said.

Mrs. Manchester had got the letter open; but Marfa took it from her and read the brief blunt lines: They had not sailed with their party. Mr. Manchester had seemed too much under the weather after his trip, and Bartholomew had stayed with him. But the South American unit had found it convenient to arrive for the next boat, and the two would sail with them and would overtake the main body of the expedition

at some point in China. That would give Mr. Manchester a week to pull himself together. Marfa said, "How heavenly of Mr. Bartholomew to wait over with him," and looked complacent, as if Mr. Bartholomew had waited for her sake. Her mother said: "Papa ought never to have gone. I should never have let him go." Her eyebrows arched, she examined space, sidewise. Marfa cried: "You! Why, you did your best to keep him! It was I who could have kept him here, if I had said the word." But her mother claimed irritably: "Nonsense. He is my husband. You are only his daughter." Marfa sat looking indignantly at her mother and said very distinctly: "If he gets sick — if he dies — it will be my fault, mother." Her mother wept, not as an expression of emotion, one might say, but as a process habitized and almost parenthetical. They fell silent. Luna opened the front door and came down the hall.

She entered the dining-room with bright eyes and a manner of haste. She was carrying a light basket covered with a napkin, and she held up a thermos bottle like a chalice. She cried: "He's feeling very bright to-day — looks better, eats better. One almost forgets that he'll never walk again." Marfa said warmly: "It's very good of

you, Luna, to have taken my place while I was gone — to have carried things to this poor soul whose life I've ruined. . . .” Luna looked at her coldly. “Ruined?” she repeated. “His life is far from ruined. And, besides, if you remember, it was not your words over the telephone but my silence that is responsible for his accident.” Marfa said quite loudly: “Luna, really, you are ridiculous. So is mama.” She poured out the news of their father, passed over Luna's lamentations. “Mama thinks *she* let papa go,” Marfa cried, “but it was I alone!” Luna set down her basket and turned, her body stiff in some sudden partial death. “Neither of you had the slightest thing to do with papa's leaving,” she said. “It was my offering to go into the store that made him decide. Whatever comes to him on this trip is *my* doing.”

Marfa looked at her mother and sister. There was Marcus Bartholomew's amused brutality: “You have to have some emotion — feeling guilty is the only one available. . . .” That, she thought, was true for Luna and her mother but it wasn't true for her. It was true of her mother, bored by the quiet routine of her house and facing a year of loneliness, or at least of lull; it was true of Luna, facing a lifetime of isolation which

stretched either way from her present, a present immersed, amazingly, in the daily sale of bathtubs and lavatories. Marfa thought: "It isn't their Christian charity, taking the blame. Luna wants something to happen, wants to be *in* things. . . ."

She said aloud: "We must face the facts. There are all those that I have remembered and haven't told you about — people whose death and misery I have been responsible for . . . I tell you that I am the one who brings evil to every one." She leaned forward and spoke with terrible distinctness: "Why in these nine days, while I have been away, I have caused the death of a woman." Her mother regarded her with pointed eyes; Luna was suddenly terribly concerned and said: "Mama, I don't think Marfa is well." Marfa repeated: "Well!" She was aware of her own tone coming from the depth of her chest. She began to walk up and down the little dining-room and to say: "Don't speak to me so. I am living out the most terrible tragedies — one after another of them. Yet you pay no attention to all that. . . ."

Against the William and Mary sideboard she saw Marcus Bartholomew's smile, heard his mocking words: "You want pretense — tragedy — anything to break your monotony. No — I don't

blame you. I think it's a healthful sign. . . ."

She fell to sobbing, standing before the William and Mary sideboard and sobbing angrily. She brushed aside Luna's hands, turned away from her mother, and bit her lip as if she knew that she was playing the fool.

And as she did so, in a sudden calm, she seemed once more to see her own body, outlined there against the dark wood and the silver, its face distorted, its breath coming quickly, its hands torturing one another, and it crying out words which suddenly seemed unintelligible. Once more she had that certainty that her curious white body, in its arbitrary clothes, had nothing to do with her, with her herself who so oddly watched it.

"It doesn't matter," she said abruptly, sat down at the table again, peeled a peach.

Luna murmured with relief that doubtless the train had tired her, hesitated, and risked adding something:

"He," she said, ". . . Max Garvin, sent a message to you, Marfa. He said to tell you that I had been taking excellent care of him."

Marfa glanced up at Luna, and remained staring at her. For Luna's face seemed to be shining in a pink light, one that folded her features in

something more golden than a blush, something that she unutterably enjoyed. She patted Marfa's arm, as if she were unaware of the gesture, and went away to her father's shop, walking erectly, stepping lightly, her even amber face lustrous and almost beautiful.

In the afternoon, at the hospital, in Max Garvin's room, Marfa sat staring at him without speaking. In that clean empty place of glass, porcelain, plaster, his broken body seemed to belong; a body drained of function, of action, even as was the white room. In her green muslin, she herself seemed irrelevant, like the rose phlox and rose gladioli burning on the table.

He said "How are you, and did you have a pleasant time?" quite as if he were lounging before a tea-table and had no personal preoccupation. When she forced herself to question him, he replied evasively, almost gaily, making out that he was well and able. "Think," he said, "of all the things I hate doing and now shall not be expected to do. That truck was a kind of liberation, you know. . . ." She said: "No human being ever had such perfect manners as you. Your life is taken away from you . . . like that! . . . and you make nothing of it. . . ." She

ended in a sob. He looked bored, said shortly: "Well, I don't like to be sympathized with, even by myself. Don't like to think about myself, in fact." She cried: "But I'm thinking of me . . ." stopped at his smile, and hurried on: "Don't you see how it would be with me . . .? For you don't fool me, Mr. Garvin. In the night — in that time before it gets light — I know how you must wake up and suffer over it — well, that's the way I feel about it — about you — all the time." "Thanks, but please don't," he said good-naturedly. She cried: "But I can't help it—it's killing me, really. If I hadn't telephoned . . ." He interrupted her sharply with: "Look here. *You* aren't in this at all. You had nothing to do with this. . . ." She cried warmly that she had to do with this more than he did, really . . . "for your body suffers, but with me it's more than that. It's more even than you, Mr. Garvin. It's the knowledge that I'm that kind of person — that things turn out terribly because of me. . . ."

He moved on his bed, that stiff, inanimate movement, as if he were a trunk which some outside force had turned. "Do you believe that?" he asked gravely. She said low: "I know it. I've thought of such things ever since I saw you. And since I saw you, I made something else frightful

happen — just by a word, as I did with you. This time it meant death. . . .” “Oh, now, Miss Marfa,” he interrupted, “you take too much on yourself.” She blazed out at him: “Don’t you tell me that! Marcus Bartholomew says it’s because I want emotions that I imagine all this, Mr. Garvin . . .” He said quickly: “No. He’s wrong. Or he may be wrong. That’s true of some, as he says. But it’s also true of others that they do draw down disaster. Only — that, you know, needn’t be true. You may be that sort, as you say. I don’t know. But you needn’t be so.” She put out her hand, as if to cover his words, to snare them and make them her own. “Why not?” she cried, and not knowing how to phrase her question, cried: “What?” He looked as if he had no idea how to reply to that, and said only: “Well, I think you have to work on it. Get your body polarized to draw the good and not the ill. . . .” She cried: “But how, how?” At this he wore an air of embarrassment, and muttered: “Don’t ask me.” But she said tensely: “I do ask you. You *must* tell me. . . .” He said almost irritably, “I don’t know. I’m not God,” then relented and added: “Be awfully decent, that’s all — over every little damn thing.” At this she looked so indignant that he laughed and apologized. “I

dare say you are, you know. But I wasn't." Already he spoke of himself, she noticed, as if his life had passed. "I wasn't. I poisoned myself — being greedy — running off after things that didn't belong to me — getting mad as a hatter — oh, Lord! 'When the devil was sick . . .' But we're such infernal fools. Well — you look decent. Most people do. But if you want the truth, you're probably all out of key, and things can't work out well for you — or for the people you're with. Mind, I don't mean in my case. You'd nothing to do with me. I had a disaster factory of my own, in me. . . ." He relaxed and said awkwardly: "I don't want to be brutal. But since this thing's happened to me, nothing but the truth seems worth talking about. Still, I don't want to be savage. . . ." He shouted querulously. "That's all I can tell you. Go out of your way to be decent and something happens to you after a while. But you can't do it on purpose, so that it *will* happen . . . I don't think I can tell you anything," he muttered; "you're too pretty, too sure. . . ."

She now felt enormous irritation at him, amazement that manifestly he did not secretly admire her; horror that he did actually feel that indirectly she might have had something to do

with his accident. She had wanted to continue to persuade him. Suddenly he said:

"Your sister seems a very harmonious person."

Luna? Luna harmonious? She stared at him incredulously.

He went on talking, looking up at some steel-white clouds and talking.

"I've noticed that about her. She seems to have in her something that does the right thing . . . makes things come out right. Had you noticed that? "

Marfa looked as if she felt that most certainly she never had noticed such a thing. But she said low: "Oh, yes. Luna does." And he shot out at her: "You're probably lying. Probably you don't think so at all. Are you sure you're not false like that all the time? " Then he looked horrified and said, "My God, what's the matter with me? Am I going to be a savage old cripple all the rest of my life? " and began to talk rapidly of Luna: "She comes into this room and brings with her an air of peace. She seems to be squared up with things . . . and yet she doesn't irritate you by being so thundering gentle as some women I've seen. That kind, I always suspect them. When they do cut loose, they can be the devil. But your sister seems to have got herself in shape, so that

she matches with whatever happens . . . and her soups are supreme."

Marfa listened, and thought: "Well — Luna did want you not to drive over that night. She wanted us not to go to The Dells. She wanted me not to have anything to do with Paul Barker. . . . Maybe Luna *is* like that." She thought: "I can't remember a time when she ever really did bring misfortune to anybody."

"She's been an angel to me," Max Garvin concluded.

Marfa rose, feeling omitted and cold. She agreed rapidly that Luna was an angel, thanked him at large for all that he had said, and added mournfully: "But you mustn't think I feel any the less to blame about you. . . ."

"Oh, thunder," said he.

Marfa drove about the streets of Old Town. Tight little houses, looking finished and inflexible, and as if their people had been boxed up by the clapboards, securely nailed in there, and painted over. There were long low white or gray houses, shaped like coffins, and draped with vines or laid with pink rambler roses, in wreaths. The business houses turned to the road tan-colored inscrutable sides, as if they were crates of goods, shipped in by

some giant traffic facility, and ranged along the streets, and bursting with raw materials. On the pavements the people moved, bottle-shaped, containers for process, for effervescence, for flatness, and with stopper-shaped heads, hollowed for the volatile, but hermetically sealed. Along the boulevards avenues of vast black trunks were ranged, piping the riches of earth to flow upward and outward, as fountains of green branches. And all houses, shops, and people shutting away their mystery; motors, animals, and birds moving about as vessels of some ceremony, whose factors were forever hidden. Marfa thought: "Bodies. Mine and theirs. Houses, shops, trees, men, animals — all bodies. What fills them, moves them?" Momentarily she had a sense of these inhabited by an energy, as her body was inhabited by her unfamiliar "I." She thought: "It's not my 'I' that makes misfortune. It's my body, like a bad brass, when the music comes. . . ." She lost all this, observing a new make of car, with a California license-plate.

She crossed the river, on a light black bridge, which seemed to have been insecurely affixed against the blue, a black lace arabesque on a pale valentine. The flow of the blue, the flow of the green, the flow of form as the meadows advanced,

arrived, and ran round her, gave her a sense of isolation, of herself as a lonely point, stable in a flowing world. Here, it seemed, were great green bodies in eternal open motion, as in town the small bodies were crystallized and closed. Fixed or flowing, what did it matter, since the core remained secret? She flew between the fields, and once more — shadowy and incredible, she herself looked from a strange momentary window upon the body which sat confidently on that gray mohair seat of the car and capably drove, acting for her, as her instrument. Max Garvin said she hadn't tuned it in. Max Garvin said that Luna was an angel. She tried to remember occasions on which Luna hadn't been an angel at all.

From a row of walnut-trees by the roadside a gray squirrel ran, nosed along the concrete, walked on four legs, hopped on two, tail curved in a perpetual salute. He was unaware of her, incredulous that a car could mean catastrophe, whatever that was. Cars were safe, not being men with shotguns. He had lived forever, would live forever. Suddenly she was directly before him, honking and even shouting, not knowing how to turn to avoid his flight. He disappeared from her sight, before the engine. She slowed, looked back; there he lay, little body flattened, little bobbing

head still incredulous. She sickened, thought, "Not even animals are safe from me," called herself ridiculous, since such things happened to any one; then remembered: "But things like that didn't happen to Saint Francis — couldn't happen to him. He was safety to all living things. He was life and not death." Max Garvin's words came back: "If you want the truth, you're probably all out of key and things can't work out right for you or for the people you're with. . . ." But she had meant to be so right. All of a sudden she felt indignation at Max Garvin, who didn't understand her, who discerned nothing of what she was. At the same time she felt monstrous loneliness. Perhaps Marcus Bartholomew would bring her father home. At this idea she felt warm and pleased, until she remembered how he had mocked at her for devising emotions. Well, there was Lawrence. At the thought of Lawrence she felt a shock, as at the image of one for some time unremembered. He would come to see her. She recalled his look, his manner, his odor; thought, "No, but I mustn't keep him, for I shall do him harm," and realized, as in a beating light, that she had this scruple, in all probability, merely because she didn't love him. Max Garvin's look came back to her when he had said: "Are you sure you're

not false like that all the time? ” Her body, there on the gray mohair seat, guiding the wheel, pressing the clutch, using the brake, sounding the horn, enjoying the motion — had she built it up of the false, through and through — sealed herself within a lot of cells as intractable as the clapboards and plaster and bricks of the houses in town — or as fluid and unstable as the fields? Or, by accusing her body of all this, was she trying to keep for herself, safe and detached within, some remnant of purity and rightness?

Max Garvin had said that Luna was an angel. She turned back toward town. She would go to see that angel.

In the office of the shop where she sold bathtubs and lavatories, Luna, long and amber, sat looking over a catalogue of plumbers' supplies. As Marfa entered this office, which was inordinately freighted with the superfluous, tidily disposed, she looked searchingly at Luna, as one who should say, “Produce your peace,” and sat down, examining her mutely, as if looking for the intangible. Luna said: “Hello, dear. I'm going to plunge into colored tile, so to say. Don't you advise it?” To which Marfa returned: “I've been to see Mr. Garvin. He seems to think you're

perfect. . . ." Nor did she turn away her eyes when Luna's face changed to that golden light which was more than any blush. Luna said nothing, but her hands seemed to caress the catalogue of plumbers' supplies. Marfa stared at her, and said: "Luna, you wouldn't think of . . ." And Luna at once replied: "Oh, he wouldn't want that!" Marfa looked away, murmuring: "Isn't that the way they decline a nomination they mean to accept?" Luna's hands fluttered the leaves of the catalogue. "Really, we've met not a dozen times," she explained. "A dozen!" cried Marfa. "My dear Luna, how antique of you. I've seen Lawrence for only two days." This her sister met with a lively interest, less in the subject than in her own escape. "Lawrence?" Luna repeated, and Marfa said calmly: "The brother of the woman I killed."

Suddenly Marfa was off, had plunged into a recounting of the tragedy of Maud Brand. Luna listened, her look revealing that she saw the thing moving before her in images. Sometimes she would pause, lingering too long on a moment — as at that image of Maud Brand in her gown of green fish-scales, her hair bound with brilliants, leaning toward Marfa at dinner, with that impudent mouth masked by solicitude; this portrait

Luna seemed to follow with her eyes, inwardly watching it until after Marfa had opened the next camera, so that Luna lost a bit of the negative and was obliged to ask her to repeat. Once, at such a point, Marfa said a reproachful "You're not listening," to which Luna cried in distress that she was, she was — and could not explain that she was listening too well, listening with creative eyes. At the last, when Marfa recounted how they had found Maud Brand on the bench, the head fallen sidewise, the hands arrested wax, Luna cried out, rose, and stood helplessly in the little office, where there was no room to pace. "You see," Marfa concluded, "I killed her. It's no good saying she shouldn't have eaten her brother alive. So she shouldn't — but she was a poor sick thing, without vitality for anything but jealousy." She stopped and looked toward the half-curtain, where the heads outside were obliviously passing. "Marcus Bartholomew would say," she added, "that Maud Brand had no emotion and was trying to fill her quota by being annoyed with me. All the same, it was I who killed her. You can't say *you* did that, Luna!" she cried with satisfaction.

She expected a train of expostulation, of rebuttal, of assurance. Instead she heard Luna, standing

there beside her, merely say softly and half articulately: "My poor Marfa. . . ." She looked up. "I did kill her, didn't I?" she demanded. Luna said, "Darling, darling," so gently that she seemed almost to be saying soothingly: "Of course, of course." At this unexpected and tacit acquiescence, Marfa began weeping, and this was weeping which, as if she divined its relief, Luna did not try to check; so that her sister, being without interruption, at last interrupted herself, and said:

"Your way would have kept Max Garvin at home, would have kept us from The Dells — would have made me drop Paul Barker. And then I shouldn't have gone off to Cousin Malvina's and met Maud Brand. What's wrong with me, Luna?"

Standing there in her straight blue gown, her amber face, with its flat edge of amber hair drooping above her sister, Luna abruptly stiffened as to some task, and when she spoke, her voice came from some far depth in her, where dwelt some sovereign authority.

"I think," she said, from that depth and in that poise, "I think, Marfa, that you care — that you care too much about yourself."

Marfa looked up in the astonishment of having

received some broad missile. Her sister spoke quickly, while there was time:

"Thoughts are meant to turn outward. Yours all turn inward. They poison you, and then they act like a poison."

Marfa sprang up, knocking to the floor the catalogue of plumbers' supplies.

"How can you?" she cried. "Don't I die, thinking of other people and the wrong that I do them?"

"Of the wrong that *you* do them," Luna agreed, "because *you* do it. That's what you think of. It's the same thing. It's always yourself, Marfa."

Before Marfa could speak, the calm voice went on: "You don't care so much that Max Garvin is a cripple as that you think you've made him one. From the first, I noticed that. You've come away from him now, sitting there all twisted and tortured — oh, he doesn't let on, but his nurses tell me how he suffers — and you're not thinking of his suffering — you're not even thinking of him — you're thinking of yourself and of what can be wrong with you. I tell you, you didn't harm him — it was I, all I! But it's he that we ought both to be thinking of, and not quarrelling over who hurt him. It's Uncle Marshall and Aunt

Phœbe, it's Paul Barker's parents, it's Mona that we ought to be remembering. It's not enough to know what's wrong with us! "

"I said 'with me,'" said Marfa icily, "not with you. You seem to be perfect."

"I don't care whether I'm perfect or a murderer — I don't care," said Luna, and picked up her catalogue. "I care only for his suffering," she added low.

In the small flawed mirror above the safe Marfa saw her own face, with its mistiness gone, with only its hard clarity showing through. She cried:

"What good does that do? Will it keep him from being a cripple? "

"It will help him with his life," said Luna. "If he'll let me, I'm going to marry him, Marfa."

As if she had expected this news and needed no time to digest it, Marfa exclaimed loudly: "He'll let you ruin your life, will he? "

"I'm not thinking of my life," said Luna with exaltation. "And he says that he will not marry me. But he loves me . . . and I shall make him let me see him through."

Marfa stared, her hard face softening, recovering its misty beauty. Suddenly she laughed low and inordinately:

"You're not thinking of him, either," she said.

"You're thinking how noble you're going to be—and about how much you'll enjoy that." She kept on laughing. "You're thinking of yourself, just as much as I am!"

In the litter of the office, they stood looking at each other, the stream of heads passing obliviously above the half-curtain. Marfa went on to speak defensive wandering words, to which Luna seemed not to be listening.

There came a rap on the ground glass of the office door, and a boy thrust in a telegram. It was from Marcus Bartholomew, was addressed to Luna, and said:

"I am leaving for home to-day with your father who is improved but quite unequal to the journey."

"Thank God," said Marfa, "that I didn't push papa down to China to die, after all."

Luna looked at her and said with deliberation: "The darling. I'm glad he's safely out of all that."

Marfa merely obliviously exclaimed: "How awfully nice that Marcus Bartholomew is coming too!"

Going down-stairs in the dusk of the cool September night, Marfa heard a fire crackling in the

dining-room, and she went to it. The fire was in the first rush of its burning, the table was partly laid for dinner, the room was empty. She sat before the fire and looked about, taking account of the familiar room, its familiarity a factor in the sudden attacking strangeness of its aspect. This was the dining-room. She stared about at it and found herself thinking: "It will be like this for fifty years. Will nothing change for me, either?"

Erralee came in with dishes — a somber figure, negative in color, in clothes, in expression, the light catching the amber plates in her hand. It occurred to Marfa that neither now nor when she had seen her earlier in the day had Erralee had for her any smile of greeting, any softening of that even glaze of countenance.

"Erralee," Marfa said almost sharply, "how is Effie?"

The glaze cracked as if it had been struck from within. Erralee began to rock her body.

"Effie she try kill herself las' Sunday night," she said, rolling her head, her eyes closed, her arms wrapped round each other.

"What do you mean?" Marfa asked angrily.

"Yas'm. She take a powdah, but it didn't work — not yet it didn't. She's in the hospital in the city . . . yas'm."

"Why did she . . ."

"She couldn't get in no school — no'm, not even with mah fif' dollars. So she went to work in a laundry, an' the man she work for — I don' rightly know, but she took the powdah. . . . Oh, mah Gawd, I'se burnt up the gravy. . . ."

Marfa sat still. At least she was not responsible for this. For Effie, whose life she had refused to interfere with, and expressly, lest she should cause harm to her, too. She had had nothing to do with Effie's being in that laundry, she had not affected Effie in any way, she had withdrawn from all connection with Effie. Abruptly, in some great gust of terrible humor, the raw meaning of this opened to her. By her refusal to touch at Effie's life, she had not the less conditioned life for Effie. She wrapped her arms round her body as Erralee's had been wrapped, her body rocking as Erralee's had rocked. She said to herself that the whole world could not be responsible for the whole world. She said to herself that it was folly to blame herself for this — or for Mona. And in the flames she saw Marcus Bartholomew's face, laughing and saying: "No, there's no kick in that — nothing clean-cut and terrible, like murder. Nothing but compassion for the mess."

When Luna came home, Marfa met her in the

passage, and said: "Luna. I wouldn't send Erralee's niece to school — wouldn't touch her life — I didn't dare. And now she's tried to kill herself . . . and I've done that."

Luna said: "The poor, poor child! I'll take Erralee and go to her. . . ."

Abruptly, in the dusk of the passage, Marfa saw her own body standing, crying out that it was to blame, and felt herself helpless somewhere inside that body. And she saw Luna's body, standing so quiet and so poised, while Luna thought of what was to be done for the girl. And Marfa cried out loudly:

"*I'll* go, too, and see what can be done for her! "

Coming down the stairs, Mrs. Manchester extended her spectacled face over the balustrade and said: "What you two found to get so interested in? "

The three came home together toward dawn — Marfa, Luna, Erralee. They had gone to the city, found the girl in her hospital, heard that she would recover, arranged that she should come to them on her discharge, and had returned on an express, rushing between a shower of sparks and a shower of stars.

At the Old Town station Luna said, "Let's go

across to Ketchum's ridge," and they had sent Erralee home, dumb, the whites of her eyes trying to thank them.

The two stood on an elevation above the tracks, looking over river marshes to the indifferent changes in the east. Some rails cut the marshes; the steel caught the light in straight ribbons; some pools shook out the light into flat rosettes. Marfa said: "Luna, when we stood there by that girl's cot, you seemed to give her strength. She looked at you. And the woman in the next cot, that one bandaged to her eyes, her eyes followed you. If they looked toward me, they looked away, back toward you. You have something." Luna said: "It's nothing. I'm used to sick people — inside me, I mean." And Marfa cried: "Inside you! That's it. But inside me I must be like Maud Brand. Malignant!" Luna said, "That's morbid," and moved away, so that she could stand alone, looking over the marshes.

Marfa would not let her be. She called to her: "Luna! We had the same parents. You were born four years before I was. Had something happened to our parents in those four years?"

Luna turned to her the dark eyes above their mats of shadow, and hollowed by her sleeplessness. "Don't put anything more on them," she said.

Marfa cried: "You see! Your spirit toward people is good—it's good. Perhaps it doesn't matter whether your head thinks straight or not."

Luna came toward her and said curiously: "Yesterday you spoke to me of Lawrence Brand, as if he—as if you—And then you talked about his sister and forgot him. Are you . . . do you . . ."

There was something about the nakedness of dawn, the nakedness of Luna's look, the chill, the ugliness, the night that they had spent, which brought from Marfa that which she believed to be the truth.

"I'm thinking about Lawrence," she said, "I couldn't bear to bring Lawrence something terrible."

"That's not thinking about Lawrence," Luna said brutally. "That's thinking about yourself."

Marfa looked indignant. "I love him too well to face life if I were responsible. . . ."

Luna's gentle laughter came, the red east rounding her face to childishness. Sometimes Marfa hated her, sometimes she loved her. Hate and love from that one stimulus; and yet there was Luna herself, deep within her image, that thin column of amber light in the sunrise.

“ Tell me what to do! ” Marfa cried angrily — shouted it, as to some one deep within that amber column.

When Luna answered that nobody on earth could tell her that, Marfa wheeled and ran down the slope alone. Her complacence was pricked, she imagined that she loathed herself and wanted to die. A man alighting from a bug-like bus looked like Lawrence. It was not he, but she lost the entire situation — Effie, Luna’s words, herself — in a memory of the delicious fulness of his mouth when he kissed her.

Marfa found that Lawrence had been calling from town. His high voice came hesitating over the wire, he said that he was wretched, lonely, that he must see her. She asked him to come down to Old Town, and as her body sat there at the telephone and asked him to come down to Old Town the next day, she was aware that her body was really her instrument, that the I watching within wanted him also. She thought: “ I have been leaving *her* to speak as best she could.” In the passage stood her mother saying, “ Only two days more till he’ll get here.” Marfa asked stupidly “ Who? ” and saw her mother’s small black eyes open and her mouth pucker and her head lift as

she explained scornfully: "Your father." At this look Marfa found herself trembling, and thought: "People throw out something that poisons you when they're no more than disapproving. I must have been poisoning people right and left with every word I've said." She cried penitently: "Oh, yes . . . father! But Lawrence Brand is coming to-morrow." Her mother asked gravely: "Does that mean that this young man's intentions . . ." Instead of a withering word, Marfa laughed and answered: "Darling, you'd much better ask my intentions. No, mine are not serious." With naïveté Mrs. Manchester observed: "Then to-day's roast warmed over will be all right for dinner, won't it?"

Lawrence came down next day, and, there being no porters at Old Town, advanced alone on the platform, his wrist looking long as he tugged at his suitcase. From the motor Marfa watched him with a current of understanding. At their meeting he seemed so exhausted, so like a runner who had reached his goal, that she was drawn to him, though she whispered: "Don't kiss me. They don't do that in Old Town, unless they want the engagement in *Supper Table Jottings*." This he seemed not to hear, but sat looking at her mutely. She thought: "His eyes are heavenly.

What is back of them to make him look heavenly like that? ” When they reached the house, she delighted in his clear-cut cultivated speech, echoing in those rooms dedicated to the slurred and the overemphatic; but when he talked with Luna, he twisted his fingers in a fashion which disconcerted and alienated Marfa. Of her scrutiny he seemed wretchedly aware. He dropped his hands and flushed, and suddenly she gave him that smile for which he had hungered, and he became another being, all gauzed with an inexpressible air.

They sat alone on the porch, and he said: “ It’s terrific to have the power of happiness or unhappiness that you have over me.” She said, “ The power of life and death,” and suddenly felt: “ Have I then the power of life over him only if I try — if I try? . . . ” She looked about the dim porch, at the simple objects, the swing, the chairs, the rugs. They stood out in incredible clarity as she said: “ Lawrence, I have never tried. Never have tried to give life to any situation. I have only felt my will in me and have followed that.” She continued to stare about as if she had said something original and tremendous. But because of his love for her, he missed the moment and said only: “ Please, then, feel the will to marry me quickly, and follow that! ” He stooped to her

hand, and sat kissing it, but Marfa looked over his head, into the darkness beyond the copper netting. And there were the bulk of tree-trunks, the vague façades of familiar houses, the invisible hollow of the sky. But these abruptly demanded that she see them differently. She looked down at his head, at its close dark hair springing beautifully, at the tense hands clinging to hers. "Lawrence!" she cried, "If I'm like that, bringing misfortune and death to every one, maybe it's because I've never tried — I mean, do you see, *tried* . . ." He held her, saying: "Your lips are soft. Your face is like velvet." So she sat silent, shading within her some light that she saw in there, shining; and now she was talking with him, the personal talk that he wanted from her.

There was a thickening of the darkness on the step without, and Luna came in. She carried a basket; her eyes were soft and reasonable and acquainted. She seemed not to be vague or distraught, but to be aware of what she was doing and what she was thinking. She paused and said: "Mr. Garvin said to say 'hello' to you, Marfa." Her face was serene in its new pink light, a light made golden as it rested on her amber face. As soon as Marfa saw her, she knew that she had persuaded Max Garvin to marry her. The inner door

opened on a rectangle of light, and Mrs. Manchester stood there, looking out and saying intensely: "To-morrow night at this time he'll be here." Lawrence, standing slim and white against the black street, waited a little too obviously, Marfa thought, for these two to be gone. The bright veil of Luna's compassion and of her sacrifice were round Luna. A great and passionate impatience clothed Mrs. Manchester — yes, and a passionate irritability. (Wouldn't she tell her husband what she thought of his traipsing off when she got hold of him again!) Three women.

Marfa thought: "It makes no difference. Papa, Max Garvin, Lawrence. Any man. Any woman. They give life or death to one another, life if they will, death if they don't know that. . . ."

Only it was not so simple. Over years, Luna had made herself fine, resonant, flexible, singing, ready to receive currents of life. And it was so of Malvina Beach. But she herself . . . she saw the years stretch out, dry, expressionless, waiting for her to walk among them, waiting for her to take Lawrence and give him life, not death and misfortune. She thought: "It makes no difference. Luna gives life to Max Garvin. She doesn't love him — her pink light is because she loves to give life. I suppose mamma and papa

had passion, but that went, and they had nothing else, and now they give each other death only because they're not built well enough to give life."

She walked to the screen door, looked at the street, smoky with dusk, cloudy with pale light from the low moon. The homes smoldered, eyes like soft coals, all the flame hidden, as if the homes were crouching creatures. She thought: "All those men and women might have married another or another, and it would have been just the same." She thought: "What a fuss we make over choosing!" Some tide, light and joyous, swept her and left her tingling. "It's more than choosing. It's to bring life and not death."

When the house was still, Marfa not yet having fallen asleep heard Luna's door open, and saw her go out into the cloudy blackness of the garden. Marfa went down and followed her, and they sat together on a garden-bench, two black figures, in the warm southwest wind. "You're going to marry Max Garvin, Luna," Marfa whispered. And Luna said yes, as if it had always been so, accepted and sacrificial. Marfa asked quickly, "What do you think of Lawrence?" — eager for the fellowship of experience. Luna answered,

"I like him. I hope you love him," and tried to see her sister's face in the milky gloom.

"It's a great thing to make another person happy," Luna said, and in her breath were the rise and dip of a discovery.

Marfa stood up beside a dark tree, below netted boughs whose tips were chalked with moonlight. She said: "Who's to measure that? Luna, I'm afraid. What is there left when love goes? Look at papa and mama, giving death to each other till papa runs away from it and yet can't escape from us, and has to come back — because he's waited too long. Love must be more — it must be something more. . . . You and I are in for that, Luna, surely. . . ."

Luna came and stood beside her. They stood slim and dark, murmuring under the tree down which the moonlight crept. A neighbor was working in his garage and whistling softly. On the street motors passed, bearing people talking, singing. The switch-engine breathed at the station.

"Yes," Luna said raptly, "we're in for that." In the darkness Marfa knew that Luna's pink light was burning in her face.

"But you're marvellous, Luna," Marfa said. "A cripple — and your whole life spent for him.

It's I who ought — Luna! I feel as if you're making up to him for what I took away from him. . . .”

There was a moment's silence and then Luna said:

“ Well, you certainly weren't the cause of his accident on purpose, Marfa.”

Marfa looked at the creamy blur of her sister's face, and said slowly:

“ I'm glad you see at last that it was *I* who was to blame for his accident, and not you.”

Luna said low: “ I think I have come to see just to-day that it really wasn't I — that just *not* saying something to you, when you were at the telephone that night, couldn't have made me responsible.”

Marfa cried: “ It would take from your sacrifice if you thought you were making up to him for something you did! ”

“ No,” Luna said, “ but I've come to see it wasn't I who was responsible, really! And, Marfa, I think papa would have started for China just the same, even if I hadn't been there to go into the store. He was bound to go. He'd have managed some way.”

Marfa looked at her sister intently.

“ How about Ben and The Dells? ” she said.

" You see now, don't you, that I was the one to blame there too — that you had nothing to do with it? Nothing to do, either, with my taking Paul Barker to Sally's house? "

Luna said: " I don't know. I don't feel so certain as I did, Marfa. . . . Those things . . . " Her voice trailed away. She stood erect, her clear dark face revealed now by the moonlight. " I'd be willing to take every bit of the blame," she said, " but I just don't feel so sure, any more, that it was I."

With a movement fluid and groping, Marfa reached out for the back of the bench, passed her hand along that, and sat down at the end, leaning forward, her wrists crossed on her breast.

" What is it, darling? " Luna asked anxiously. " Don't blame yourself — you mustn't blame yourself. Those things just happen — they happen to every one . . . "

Marfa said one word. " Puppets," she said. " Puppets."

" What do you mean? " Luna asked blankly, and sat down beside her. But Marfa sprang away, and began walking up and down in the moonlight, under the tree.

" Marcus Bartholomew said," she cried, " that *I wanted* to blame myself for these things — that

I insisted on blaming myself, because I must have some emotion. He said that I took that blame on myself instead of having hysterics or melancholia or going in for social service — that it answered the same purpose. Well — and look at me! Now that I have Lawrence, now that I have something to *do*, I could begin thinking that I can give life, instead of death and misfortune, if only I try hard enough. And look at *you*! As soon as you have Max Garvin, even that cripple, you're not so sure any more that you were responsible for Paul — or Ben . . . or Max himself. . . . That's to say, we don't any longer need the excitement of being responsible. Luna! Marcus Bartholomew was right! ”

Luna said: “Nonsense. And don't speak so loud, dearest. There's somebody working in that garage.”

“But he was right! ”

“Well,” Luna said comfortably, “suppose he was. If one goes on and does one's best . . . ”

“No,” said Marfa loudly, “it's not enough! It's not enough! ”

She ran a bit away, up the length of the garden, through the darkness. The silence which fell on them both was abrupt and dominant, a tremendous positive. The silence, lying upon the

garden. Silence, darkness, the faint wash of leaves. The sliding of the garage-door beyond the hedge, the neighbor's footsteps, the closing of his house-door. Silence and vacancy, night and its powerful energy, arrested motion . . . silence. All that had been motion shown suddenly as the play of puppets. Marfa, hidden in the darkness and the silence, and seeing Marcus Bartholomew's face laughing at her.

She was under the tree where she had played as a little girl. With no sense of wonder, she stood in the dark light and abruptly saw the procession of her manifest selves, as they had looked. Her little self, staring and staggering, in pink rompers; the eight-year-old child, wearing its second body, the first octave of the years sloughed off and gone and the second body assumed; then the adolescent, shy and awkward and agonized; then the lovely dreaming vessel of the early twenties, so sure, so crystallized, so confidently its own. Four of them, facing her, and here she was, distinct from them all. Here she stood, watching those four in whom she had lived and moved and whom she had involuntarily exchanged and never once chosen. Every one of them had said "I," and had meant the same "I," identified with those four bodies in turn. And now here she was,

Marfa, the "I" indeed, looking at the four shells, discovered to have been never vital, never personal, never she at all. She felt homeless and unclaimed. Where in all those units had she herself ever rested or moved? She stared at the four, the mazed baby, the squirming child, the silent adolescent, the confident girl. And what, in God's name, were they? Husks of what? Of that I, who now beat so comfortably in her own breast and was unaware of any change? She felt herself as some fluid, passing in and out of these bodies at will, no more to them than to the moonlit tree, the southwest wind, the stars.

But why, then, wasn't it perfect, that self, that I — as perfect as tree and star? Like a flash of pure light, tearing its way through her brain, she now felt that it was perfect, that its only earthly concern was to perfect a body and a physical brain through which it could express its own perfection. Through the years something hard and bright and pure, like a meteor, had blazed within those bodies, had taken on one and another, patiently trying, by forcing upon the body choice after choice, to make an instrument through which to speak, to act, to impart, to receive, to be aware, to be. She looked on these four instruments in an extremity of distaste — the blob of

sensation which was the baby's body, the rank fertility of the growing child, the overspecialization and the underspecialization of those next two husks. Every one of them crude and untended, the baby no more so than the body of twenty. And three of them coarse of cell, rotten, packed with the flesh of beasts, poisoned by their own evil or stupid or brutal emanations, by anger or malice or vanity or cruelty. Four instruments of the I — and not one of them more than a cracked and tortured shred of flesh and nerve and bone, its functions deflected and undiscovered . . . and all this true of the body in which she now stood. Five of them — and that hard, bright core of the life wandering in and out of them like a spirit straying among dark stars. Five of them — and every one formed of that which drew to itself evil, and spread evil to others. And when for one moment had she set herself to make of her body an instrument for the word of the I? She had meant to be so right and had done nothing whatever about it. She saw the innumerable hard bright cores of the spirit sweeping down the world, every one patiently trying to fashion its terrible body to express its own brightness. And all the bodies doing nothing about it.

When she did not return, Luna made her way

slowly up the path, saying gently: "Marfa. Don't be so . . ." Marfa faced her sister and spoke passionately:

"You must think what you like," she said; "I know very well that you're finer than I am — that you're an angel, as Max Garvin said. Things do happen beautifully and wonderfully for you, because you're that kind of person. It may be that you blamed yourself only because you were bored, just as Marcus said I did. All that is nothing so long as you don't mind. But I do mind. I won't be danced about like a doll on a string by a lot of things in me that I never even saw. I tell you, Luna — I'm going to get out of this."

Luna patted her arm. "Well, darling," she said, "we'd better go in now."

"You're good, Luna — you're good!" Marfa cried. "I can see that. But I'm different — I'm made of hell and devils — I've got to begin and do me again, so certain things'll follow me instead of the devilish ones. And I'll not begin by fooling myself and Lawrence too."

"You'll not throw him over?" Luna said sharply.

"I'm not talking about marrying," Marfa said. "I'm talking about something more."

"But what?" Luna demanded.

"Oh, God," said Marfa. "I don't know the name of it. But if we gave it half the pains we put on marrying, we should know."

She remembered that small, dark, cell-like room, that unvisited "chapel," and when Luna had gone to her room, Marfa slipped in there and lit the broken tipsy candles. "A church where none cometh to pray." There was dust on the floor, on the table and the sill, and a cobweb swung from the picture-frame. Her mother had talked of renting the den and turning the chapel into a kitchenette. Mrs. Manchester was deeply religious, but "a chapel in the home is affectation, *I think*," she said. She had left it undisturbed from a vague filial feeling, less piety than an associative emotion for her own childhood.

"What *is* there?"

Marfa tried to lay hold on something, on one single thing that she could hold to. Certainly they had tried to educate her, tried to give her religion, led her to expect relationships. But she had little education that seemed related to life, no religion at all, and in all her relationships she had failed. Her mind reached for one solitary reality which she could touch and say: "There is

that, at least." And there was nothing. Even she herself was no more than that fluid parade of colorless bodies, aged one, aged five, aged fourteen, aged twenty, and now aged twenty-three — bodies which lapped round her and disappeared into darkness. . . .

"Bodies which lapped round me. . . ."

Clear, like glass, like water, like air, that *me* hung for her momentarily, changeless in its procession of dissolving bodies.

Without a trace of humor she thought: "My God, *I'm* real."

Untrained in any aspect of philosophic thinking, she confronted as might a savage the naked fact of her consciousness. As a primitive rising from some depth, full-bodied and aware, she was seated in the flux of her world and suddenly knew herself to be a positive point within the flow of her forms.

"I'm something," she said in extreme astonishment.

She rose, stood before the picture of the Light of the World, which had meant nothing to her; walked through the rooms of her home, which bored her; felt in her body the familiar weight of oppression, of the shock of recent death and disaster and pain. She entered her own room and

stood where on many occasions her violent being had asserted itself, struggled, expressed pride, purpose, and vanity. But never before had it been aware of its own simple identity nor had it named itself. "I'm I," Marfa thought, with the amazement of the Cro-Magnon had he been told by a mirror the truth about himself.

She stood at her window, looking down on the quiet lawn, with its small shuttles of moonlight. She said over her discovery, that first personal pronoun acquiring by repetition a dazzling intensity. Then a further thought smote her, with colloquial simplicity. "What on earth *is* that?" she wondered, for the first time in her twenty-three years.

She woke with a sense of excitement and tension, and hurried down-stairs, looking about with expectation; but not for Lawrence, whom she dreaded to see alone. She was filled by some agitation which was like premonition and like the breath of some emotion never before known to her.

Mrs. Manchester was beset by outward stresses not less violent. The things which her husband liked to eat were baking in the kitchen, the house had been swept and ordered as if for a funeral.

Luna, too, came back from the hospital, her light beaming vigorously through her, and hurried down to clear the office desk.

In all this movement Marfa moved and held her secret. What secret? She wondered if all the people knew, and if they didn't talk about it because the words one knew weren't suited to that being within one, but only to one's body — one's bodies, going about. She looked at the others covertly — Lawrence, Luna, her mother. Had *they* any idea of this powerful thing, this quiet anonymous I, waiting to take charge? She felt double, felt light, and quick. She tried to fit her feeling into the little that she knew of the unconscious, and dismissed all with the certainty that this was other, this was more, this was so simple that it was overlooked by the wise. She felt freedom, resolution, purpose, interest. She threw herself into her tasks, sang, was good-humored, revealed to Lawrence some influence which expressed for him all of heaven; and she looked at her mother with immense understanding. She thought: "Why has this occurred to nobody before?" She was the Cro-Magnon seeing himself for the first time in a mirror, and thus discovering himself to be there at all. She thought: "I'll wait till father comes before I talk with Lawrence."

Lawrence slipped away for a tramp just before her father was to arrive. "He might wonder," he explained, ". . . and so do I," he added. Marfa and her mother sat on the screened porch and waited for Mr. Manchester and Mr. Bartholomew, whom Luna had driven to the station to meet. The hollow porch, curved in its hollow of leaves, of lawn, of calm afternoon air, looked outward upon a border of pavement whereon the neighbors passed faithfully. Marfa wondered how many of them went a little mad, went spiritually naked to sharp blasts, and how many of their fellows they had delicately and discreetly killed. Mis' Armes and Mis' Mears went along, eyebrows protestingly arched as they chattered; and the bakery-wagon moved lazily by, its bay horse apparently bearing his motor in his striving head. Over all arched the encompassing hollow of silken sky, beautiful wilds of light.

Mr. Manchester, Mr. Bartholomew, and Luna came up the steps. Except for the bags, they looked as if they had come home from golf, from the shop, from the post-office. It had been expected that Mr. Manchester would droop, would lean, would be pallid; but he alighted flexibly, and came at a smart pace up the walk and the steps. Marcus Bartholomew trundled after, his

square figure proceeding with the lateral movement of a fowl feeding. "Well!" cried Mrs. Manchester, her welcome brilliantly edged with "I told you so's," like a bright fringe—too discreet to appear, in this first moment, as a sober fabric. "Well, darling," Marfa said, as if she were his mother. To Marcus Bartholomew she exclaimed prettily: "To give up your trip! You can't know how we appreciate this . . ." but he must have missed something in her tone, for he glanced at her sharply, and away, as if he missed something, too, in her face. They all talked at once.

Sitting with his knees extending well beyond the seat of his chair, his feet retreating, a hand on a leg, the other hand thrusting capably back through his hair, Mr. Manchester affirmed that it had been great, great.

"But papa, darling, you were ill!" Marfa cried.

"A nothing — a mere digestive upset. The moment the boat sailed, I was feeling all right again."

Marfa glanced at Luna, as one who says: "The darling. He hated the idea, at the last."

"But you could have taken the next boat — with the South Americans," his wife amazingly cried, and added: "After the neighbors all

thought you'd . . . But I'm glad you didn't," she added quickly.

At this Mr. Manchester looked stricken. And Marfa glanced at Luna as one who says: "That's how mama kills him, bit by bit."

"I had a nice little outing," he claimed, looking about. "A nice little outing. I'm glad to get back to work. How's business been, Luna?" he asked.

He began opening a small worn bag, in which he had long kept and had carried away certain specimens whose period he wanted the experts to place. These specimens he was painstakingly ranging on the porch table as Luna told him about the fortnight's sale of bathtubs and lavatories. Mercifully he did not hear his wife murmur: "That's a clean table-spread. . . ." When he had the precious things laid out, Luna said brightly: "I expect you'll go next year, papa — to China." But at this he looked suddenly old and dry, and said "No, no, I shan't go . . . now."

Marcus Bartholomew sat with his arms folded across his square chest, his head bent forward on his thick neck. When the others had gone indoors, Marfa said to him:

"Why did papa come back?"

Bartholomew said: "I think he funk'd it. I

think he'd waited too long, d'you see." He added: "It aged him. He'd tried and couldn't bring it off — it aged him. Of course just now he's putting on. . . ."

Marfa did not turn away her eyes, whose lids dropped as she seemed to look through and beyond Marcus Bartholomew.

"You mean, if he'd stayed at home," she said slowly, "he'd have kept on having something to look forward to. Now he thinks he's old — knows he'll never have anything more. . . ." She added: "I could have kept him at home if I had said the word. He told me so. . . ."

Bartholomew said: "You could have kept me too, you remember. And I didn't mind coming back. Did you miss me, Marfa?"

She said crisply: "Not in the least."

He kept on looking at her. "I wanted to tell you," he said. "When I got away from you, I found that I love you — more than I'd made out to you. And I find that knowing you has rather precipitated things for me. Mrs. Bartholomew is in Paris. I shall go there and arrange for the divorce — and then go on around to China. Unless you'll let me come back."

She began to say, "Not to me, my friend . . ." and then crumpled down in her chair and stared

at him. "I've pushed you toward this . . . done I don't know what to your wife. I've taken away from papa his hope and his confidence — made him disappointed and old. . . ."

Bartholomew said: "Oh, rot. Aren't you ready to give up your made-up emotions for some real ones?"

She went on: "I've spoiled Luna's life — married her to a cripple. . . ."

Luna came out with the tea-things. Marfa stumbled away to the kitchen. There in a corner Erralee stood, her great black hands over her face, her squat body swaying. She wailed.

"My sister's got her in their parlor . . . Effie's done it this time. Just as soon as she got out of the hospital she done it — and she's good and dead now. Seems lak my whole fif' dollars wasn't enough for nothin'. . . . She's laid her out in their parlor. . . ." It was Luna who broke into exclamation and clamor. Marfa's hands went on making the tea.

Marfa went back to the porch and handed the cakes. In the slanting afternoon light the copper screens shone, thin walls of webbing separating a trial eternity from eternity. Green running from plant to plant, yellow in a cage, measures of color and song risen elsewhere and not created

there on that porch; light reed furniture, hollowed in expectation of the human body; shaded tile, latticed ceiling — all these in indifference to the beings who had thus seized upon pure surface, pure direction, and made them their own, for earthly uses.

For what uses? Marfa handed the cakes, looked at Luna in her pink light; at their father in his gray light; at their mother, bland or comatose; at Marcus Bartholomew, about to sail for Paris, to arrange. She thought of Maud Brand, Paul Barker, Ben, looking tall in their coffins; of Effie, laid in some parlor; of Mona and her children; of Lina, blind; of that forgotten *chef*, that forgotten child, with its scar; of Max Garvin, in his wheel-chair; of Luna and of what her life would be, of the squirrel in the road. She handed the tea, heard the talk, was aware of the passers in the street. She thought: "Now papa — and Mrs. Bartholomew — and Effie. After all, there's no help for me. I'm like that, and I'm nothing more."

When she was free, she ran out of the house alone, and went to the hospital. It was after visiting-hours, but they let her go up to Max Garvin's room. When she tapped, his voice sounded queer to her, and when she entered she

was overpowered to discern that the man had been crying.

"Don't mind me," he said, "there's a tradition that men don't do that sort of thing. They do, though."

She said: "I know. We keep on pretending. . . . But you! This kills me. It kills me."

She sat before him and told him about her own wretchedness in having made him wretched. It was her own wretchedness, really, of which she was talking. He listened patiently until she said:

"And now I've hurt my father — broken his confidence in his own power, and I've failed to help a girl, and she is dead, and I've made a woman more miserable than she was. Tell me — wouldn't I better kill myself and stop the rest? "

He seemed ill and old, and his bathrobe was ugly. And he looked at her unsympathetically, as if she were another man. She thought: "I don't believe he knows about this." But he answered sharply: "If you kill yourself, you're likely to make things worse. I'd stick it and start the job now." When she asked him what job, he cried irritably: "Doesn't it get to you that you are actually an inharmonious person? That you've got to do yourself over. . . ." He stopped. "Certainly

it gets to me," she said sharply. "But what on earth shall I do?" He hitched the ugly bathrobe about and said that she wasn't to ask him.

"But you know!" she cried desperately. "Look here, Mr. Garvin. I've had a sense of something in me, hard and bright, that *is* me, really."

"If you know that," said Max Garvin, "that's all you need. You've started back."

She thought: "Is this man delirious?" But at once she found some divination of his words — quite as if she had lost and then regained some musical ear.

"I wondered the other day if you'd ever get it," he said. "There's no doubt about you. Your body has been floundering like a fish in air. Now you're in the current — I can see that by what you tell me."

"But what have I told you?" she cried. "I don't know myself — only that thing in me that I call *I*. . . ."

"It's enough," he answered, and looked at the door as if he wished that she would go. She rose, but she cried again:

"But what shall I *do*?"

He said nothing. She saw that this matter was her own despair.

She went into the fields and to the flat summit of a low cove whose shallow sides were smoothly feathered with green. The field had been harvested, and its black loam under pallid stubble, lying luxurious and relaxed, its labor ended, was in itself no avowal of anything, no end at all, but merely the vessel through which life had moved and now was gone again.

For her, Marfa thought, life had moved and was gone. There remained the wretchedness that she had caused — that was immortal, it seemed. But of her there was only that problematical inner one who could not handle this medium of body and brain, who now found life nothing. To take away body and brain into nothingness, to set free that bound *I*, who had meant to be so right! She thought: "Here I am, at twenty-two — nothing. Wishing for death. If I could die — if I could be done with failing when I don't even know I've failed. . . ." They came toward her again, that long procession whom she had injured by the word either spoken or withheld, her body acting without her, uttering the wrong word or keeping the wrong silence, independently of her intention. As a primitive woman dealt disaster by design, so she worked sorrow through the physical ineptitude of her

machine. Marcus Bartholomew's face, like the face of a giant, mocked her against the trees of the valley, crying his gay charge to her body: that it desired and created emotion, even the emotion of self loathing; mocked her and then dissolved to the figure of Garvin, in its ugly bathrobe, snapping savagely its "Doesn't it get to you that you *are* an inharmonious person. . . ."

Well, it had got to her. She looked at nothing, thought of nothing, as if she expected the energy of earth, of air, of sun to remodel the moment, to omit her from their substance. These did nothing of the sort. All were quiet against the time when she should destroy Lawrence too, and he would look tall in his coffin, like Paul and Ben.

A trickle of sound came up to her from the slope, a sound homely and derived, a whistle, not a very good whistle, hesitating and now and then frankly out of key. Against the trees of the ridge she saw him coming across the fields, Lawrence, picking his way among stubble, not looking in the least as if he were about to be destroyed.

The field held light, a wash of shadow gathering from the west. The yellow of the stubble, the scarred black of the ground, the green of the air

about the leaves, these flowed into the motion of the earth about her, a hollow in which her body lay, as in a grave. But within her, something heard that whistle, faintly out of key, homely and accustomed, and knew itself to be living, knew itself not different from all that rushed upon her in onslaughts of light, shadow, stubble, leaves, ground. Lawrence's whistle, who couldn't follow a tune. . . .

Among the furniture of the field, all standing out in sudden incredible clarity, Lawrence came up the slope of the cove.

"Rot, dearest," he said, to the broken words into which she poured her broken thought.

"You've seen what I bring to people. It may take me years. . . ."

"You'll bring me disaster if you don't marry me. I'd choose the death you might bring, if it came to that."

At this glare of his feeling she cried: "Would you want me to marry you if I brought you disaster?" But this he seemed to take as a mere supposititious question, one of those tangents in which love delights, the better to find itself safe. So she began laboriously, recounted to him all that train of tribulation of which she had found herself the author — all that she had told him

on their ride, all that she had remembered since that day. He said that every one brought pain as well as joy, that the job was to get the balance on the right side, but at his bookkeeping metaphor she felt injured and observed that not every one seemed to understand the universe so well. He cried in surprise: "But from the cradle every one knows these things!"

She examined his face as if it were strange to her, now that he was speaking without the urge of the personal to which she was accustomed in him. Moreover he had shown none of the impulse to take her in his arms which the blue publicity of the sky and the green privacy of the hill suggested. She thought: "Perhaps he doesn't love me." Now as she saw him standing black against the far fields, remote from her, not looking at her, not sharply aware of her, she began to discern in him a nobility which she had never before detected. This perception she did not question, did not relate; she was merely held by it. She thought: "Lawrence seems more."

Still in that preoccupation in which she appeared to have no part, he said: "Maybe you meant that another power than either pain or happiness governs love." And this she did not wholly understand. She felt nettled and respect-

ful. She said stiffly: "I have to be different. I have to be more." When he answered in manifest surprise, "All right, dearest," she thought that she hadn't been clear, and tried to explain about that *I* which was there, she said, all the time. At this he seemed not so much puzzled as patient.

"You know, Marfa," he said, "one sees them already in Europe — young French people I've seen, who *want* to be right — who are bored by the old stuff."

But she said that being right wasn't enough, for she had meant that too, and it got you nowhere. She said:

"My body is Borgia — but I am not she. I am I. I have only to act instead of her. . . ." She spoke of her body as a tool, a clay.

He stood before her and exclaimed: "Well, let's not talk about that any more. I love you."

Now abruptly she was aware of herself, that bright core, that *I* of her discovery, motionless there beside that *I* which was Lawrence. No more than that. She stared at him against a flashing sky, and they standing in the field through which life many times had surged and withdrawn. Two cores of being, alone, in the long procession of their bodies. Being, trying to be manifest.

Now the isolation of her evil fell from her and she felt herself with all the people, and they in the same case, free but bound; and with that identical anxious *I*, striving to deal in life and not in death.

“Right, Marfa?” he asked.

“Right, Lawrence,” she said only.

They began to talk as lovers talk, and moved across the lit fields.

*This book
is set in Garamond, a
modern rendering of the type
first cut in the sixteenth century by
Claude Garamont (1510-1561). He was a
pupil of Geofroy Tory and is believed to have
based his letters on the Venetian models, although he
introduced a number of important differences, and it is
to him that we owe the letter which we know as Old
Style. He gave to his letters a certain elegance and a
feeling of movement which won for their creator an
immediate reputation and the patronage of the French
King, Francis I.*

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